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The Art of Modern Living and the Making of English Middlebrow Culture at the Fin-de-Siécle: The Case of Elizabeth von Arnim

by

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Abstract

The Art of Modern Living and the Making of English Middlebrow Culture at the Fin de Siècle*: The Case of Elizabeth von Arnim*

While previous histories of the middlebrow have loosely related it to modernism and have located it in the interwar period, I suggest that the received characteristics of the middlebrow as it has traditionally been defined—market savvy, consumer oriented, socially aspirational, and culturally conservative—are present within a certain sector of English literature as early as the *fin de siècle*, as evidenced by the work of Elizabeth von Arnim, an Anglo-Australian writer whose work was popular with readers between 1898 and 1940. On the basis of von Arnim's early work, I argue not only that the chronology of middlebrow culture must be stretched to include a *fin-de-siècle* genesis, but that more attention within middlebrow studies should be paid to matters of genre, a variable that both reveals middlebrow values and allows us to trace the encoding of those values from the *fin de siècle* right through to the interwar period. In the case of von Arnim, I isolate the genre of domestic diary fiction and argue that it constitutes a formal encoding of middlebrow cultural investments in the concepts of consumption, cultivation, and conservation, with particular consideration of how they relate to women's domestic lives with the advent of modernity. I discuss the way in which the domestic diary genre drew on a number of *fin-de-siècle* literary and social discourses, including that of the New Woman, suburban living, and the "diary craze" of the 1890s. By canvassing von Arnim's contemporary reception as well as her dialogue with publishers and readers, I also scrutinize von Arnim's participation in and contributions to a middlebrow marketing culture whose legacy is still with us, in the form of literary celebrity and personality branding.

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Introduction
Modernism, Gender, and the Problem of "Elizabeth"

> Death Takes Its Toll in Literary World
> In recent weeks three notable figures in the world of literature have been removed by death—James Joyce, Elizabeth Countess Russell, and Scott Fitzgerald. It is because of their eminence . . . that we think something ought to be added to the brief obituary notices which they received.
> -J. V. McAree, *Toronto Globe and Mail* (4 Mar.1941)

The three "notable" literary figures eulogized in 1941 by J.V. McAree—James Joyce, Elizabeth Countess Russell, and F. Scott Fitzgerald—pose a curious triad to readers sixty years later. While James Joyce and F. Scott Fitzgerald would commonly be identified as high profile figures of modernist aesthetics—Joyce playing modernism's pontiff, Fitzgerald its playboy—Elizabeth Countess Russell—or Elizabeth von Arnim, as she's come to be known—is something of an enigma. That every critic should be allowed a certain margin of error in predicting literary posterity the generous reader of literary history would concede; however, what seems striking is McAree's utter certitude of the eminence of the now obscure writer: "We can speak with . . . confidence of Elizabeth," he states authoritatively, "who has for a long time been one of our favourite authors" (*Globe and Mail*). Nor was McAree alone in his convictions. The *New York Herald Tribune* mourned the death of Elizabeth, referring to her flirtatiously as that "wise and witty little minx" (10 Feb.1941), while *The London Times* also mourned the passing of the author who had won "the esteem and regard of a considerable public," and whose every work "was interpenetrated by [an] unusually vivid and lovable nature and [a] persuasive sense of fun" (11 Feb.1941). In the *Daily Sketch*, Hugh Walpole declared Elizabeth "one of the very few witty women novelists of England" (a distinction he reserved, incidentally, for the likes of Jane Austen), and made a bid for her legacy to live

on, for "English literature is not so crammed with wits that it can spare Elizabeth".[1] Elizabeth von Arnim has largely disappeared from the annals of the literary history of modernism, though her prolific career spans nearly the entire period literary historians most often identify with the modernist movement—1890 to 1930—and her credits include twenty-one novels, a hit play at London's Haymarket Theatre (1910), an appearance in *Time* magazine, and a wide acquaintance of prominent modernist figures such as E.M. Forster, Katherine Mansfield, and Bertrand Russell. Who was Elizabeth, and why is it that a history of modernism has not taken account of her?

"Elizabeth"

Born in New Zealand in 1866, the author later known variously as Elizabeth or Elizabeth von Arnim, was christened Mary Annette (May) Beauchamp. She was the youngest of a large Australian family that emigrated to England in 1870. A precocious child, May's propensity for artistic expression declared itself most forcefully through music. She turned to writing, however, after marriage to a landed German junker, Graf Henning von Arnim, lead to her subsequent settlement on a remote Pomeranian estate called Nassenheide. Inspired by Alfred Austin's "The Garden That I Love" and her own experiences creating a garden in the German countryside, May wrote a lightly fictionalized diary account of her daily life and sent the manuscript on a whim to Macmillan and Company. The anonymous publication of the manuscript in 1898 under the title *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* caused an international literary coup, not only because of its popularity—the novel ran to twenty-two printings within a year of its release—but also because of the mystery shrouding the author's identity, which generated a great deal of speculation within the British press. Despite such publicity, Countess von

[1] Hugh Walpole's obituary for Elizabeth was printed in the *Daily Sketch* (qtd in Usborne 310).

Arnim eluded the press's detection. Though her actual name changed several times during her lifetime—born Mary Annette Beauchamp, she became Grafin Mary Annette von Arnim upon her first marriage and Countess Mary Annette Russell on her second—she continued to write under the name "Elizabeth," which became something of a brand-name under which a series of sequels to *Elizabeth and her German Garden* were published, *The Solitary Summer* appearing in 1899, *April Baby's Book of Tunes* in 1900, and *Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen* two years later. According to critics, von Arnim's first conventional third-person novel, *The Benefactress* (1901), registered "the same distinctive charm as its predecessors, the same unforced wit, the same wholesomeness that made Elizabeth's Garden so successful a tonic for the dreary minded" (*Daily Mail* qtd in Usborne 90), and placed von Arnim well on her way to being credited by the *Evening News* with "an insight into life which makes the author one of the finest, if not the finest of present day writers" (118). Not content to rest on the literary laurels of the "German Garden" series, von Arnim experimented with the epistolary novel (*Fraulein Schmidt & Mr. Anstruther* in 1907; *Christine* in 1916), successfully adapted her own novel for the stage (*Priscilla Runs Away*), and transformed her experience of a failed marriage to Frances Earl Russell into a gothic novel—*Vera* (1921)—that McAree considered an "unequalled masterpiece" ("Death Takes Its Toll").[2] A favourite of Book-of-the-Month Club readers, von Arnim was familiar enough a literary personage by 1935 to figure in newspaper quizzes such as the *London Times*' "Problems at Leisure".[3] She also cultivated a wide circle of literary acquaintances. Consequently, though largely forgotten as a writer, she has lived on in the work of many of her contemporaries, having

[2] McAree, "Death Takes Its Toll."
[3] Her novel, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, featured in one of the questions in a general reading knowledge quiz in the *Times* on December 24th, 1935.

been enshrined forever as Mrs. Harrowdean in H. G. Wells' *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*, Mrs. Failing in E. M. Forster's *The Longest Journey*, and as Rosemary Fell in her cousin, Katherine Mansfield's, "A Cup of Tea". Her appearance in *Time* magazine in 1940, just a few months before her death, was the result of Elizabeth having produced yet another bestseller with her twenty-first novel, *Mr. Skeffington*, and a testament to a distinguished career in letters spanning more than four decades. Upon her death in 1941, many readers would have agreed with the *New York Herald Tribune*, that the name "Elizabeth" was "the hallmark of excellence" (10 Feb 1941).

Such recognition was short-lived, however. "About Elizabeth," George Lyttleton wrote reminiscently to Rupert Hart Davis in 1956, "Does anyone read her books now, and if they were as good as we all thought, why not? How odd is fame" (10-11 Oct. 193). The "oddity of fame"—that is, the exclusion of Elizabeth Countess von Arnim from the history of modern literature—strikes at the heart of the literary historian's dilemma, which is, in the words of Regina Marler, the problem of "deciding what to omit" (*Bloomsbury Pie* 119). Issues of inclusion and omission in the construction of literary history reflect the politics which have shaped literary studies as a cultural institution. Despite Tony Bennett's reminder that texts do not have intrinsic value but are "valued by valuing subjects of particular types and for particular reasons" (xx), certain texts have *appeared to be* intrinsically important over the last century and a half. Throughout much of the twentieth century, the canon—as a repository of valuable texts—was created and jealously guarded by an intellectual elite who attempted to naturalize aesthetic hierarchy (as well as its own role in maintaining it) through an appeal to the cultural clout of literary modernism and the formalist discourse it privileged. A canon-based literary

history was seriously challenged in the 1960s, however; with the rise of sociology, cultural studies, feminism, and post-colonial studies, literary studies began to argue for the merits of a recuperative literary history that reflected the struggle between competing groups of "valuing subjects" to determine the value of texts in various historical periods. In their essay collection *Women and Literary History: "for there she was"*, Katherine Binhammer et. al. point out that this dialogue between literary studies and various sociological approaches has encouraged literary historians to pursue literary history as a form of recuperation, in the sense of "restoring [a field or period] to its original condition" (226). Such recuperation necessarily involves a reconstruction not just of a period's literature, but of the historical relationship between literature and culture: in the words of the editors of *Women and Literary History*, "we need to relate literary outcomes more closely to the complex web of cultural and economic conditions which shaped [them]" (11). Literary historians must consider factors like gender, class and nationality alongside literary issues such as genre and form, even if such a consideration forces them to violate the boundaries and classifications that have traditionally structured literary history, particularly in terms of provenance and periodization. It means, in the case of this particular literary history, a return to the literary discourse of modernism and a challenging of its traditional construction by literary historians. The literary history that follows offers a strategy for re-imagining modernism in order to account for writers like Elizabeth von Arnim, as well as the complex *fin-de-siècle* sociology of English literature that produced her.

In the field of literary studies, modernism has been a hotly-contested concept throughout much of the twentieth century. For many decades dominant conceptions of

modernism defined it as a constellation of aesthetic practises commonly associated with the international (though mainly Euro-American) *avant-garde* of the early twentieth century. Harold Rosenberg has called it "the tradition of the New" (qtd in Child 2), and certainly it was an aesthetic project which privileged newness, historical rupture, and the adoption of radical formal experimentation. While some have defined modernism by what it rejected—it initiated a radical departure from the conventional nineteenth-century narrative techniques for rendering realism, as well as the conventional organization and interests of nineteenth-century publishing culture—others have defined it by the formal innovations it adopted, including prose techniques such as interior monologue and stream of consciousness.[4] Still other critics, concerned about the complication of applying the term "modernism" to the innovative work of writers such as John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins, have fought to define modernism as a discrete historical period.[5] The chronological definition of modernism—usually cast as a period falling roughly between 1890 and 1930—is not, however, without its complications. Arguments may be made that the "period" of modernism began either much earlier than 1890—in the sixteenth century, for instance, or with the Enlightenment—or even somewhat later: Virginia Woolf, for example, declares in favour of "December 1910" as the starting point for modernism (4). The term was not applied as an explicit literary classification until the appearance of Robert Graves' and Laura Ridings' *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* in 1927, so in some sense any use of the term "modernist" to describe writing before 1927 might

[4] Many of literary modernism's proponents have been associated with the technique, including Dorothy Richardson, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf.

[5] This was no doubt a response to critics who tried to apply modern aesthetics synchronously, to writers of such varying time periods as John Donne and Gerard Manley Hopkins, who arguably demonstrate the same 'modern' taste for formal experimentation and autonomous aesthetics as that of the early twentieth century *avant-garde*.

be viewed as anachronistic.[6] In fact, considering such complications, we might do well to query the use-value of the concept of "modernism" as an organizing principle for literary history at all, especially when it fails to create a space for writers such as Elizabeth, who was considered by many of her contemporaries to be a notable figure of early twentieth-century literature.[7]

Despite its limitations, I am convinced that the concept of "modernism" is a valuable one, allowing us to refer to a culture extremely aware of its relationship with modernity. Certainly most historians agree that the second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the dissolution of a "Victorian synthesis" which made way for a period of self-conscious newness generated by a preponderance of innovations in urbanization, transport, communications, manufacture and commerce, science, and socio-political ideology. Modernity inspired the emergence not only of a peculiarly "modern" subjectivity and social experience; it also inspired new modes of representing that subjectivity and experience through the arts. Though one mode—high modernism—valorized *avant-garde* responses to modernity, particularly in the sphere of letters, it was not the only cultural response to modernity. It is with a much broader sense of the modern in mind that I enter into a discussion of Elizabeth von Arnim and her work, hoping to complicate an oversimplified notion of modernism which aligns it with certain aesthetic forms or predictably-demarcated chronological constraints. Alan O'Shea has

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[6]Though the term "modernist" seems to have appeared rather lately on the literary scene, Malcolm Bradbury suggests that the term "modern" was being used to describe various aspects of culture through the second half of the nineteenth century. He writes the following: "[w]hen Walter Pater in his study *The Renaissance* (1873) talked of 'modern sensations,' or George Moore called his novel of 1883 *A Modern Lover*, or that same year George Brandes celebrated the "Men of the modern breakthrough,' people knew more or less what was meant: an alertness to the fragile moods of a time of change, a sense of transition and transience, a new manner of behaviour, a fresh reaching out to the forces that would shape the future" (49).

[7] Such a question might sound extremely straightforward, but I must credit Mica Nava with articulating it in such a forthright manner as to prompt me to reconsider the necessity of using the term in revisionary literary histories.

pointed out, in *Modernity's Disavowal*, that if modernism is to be examined less as an aesthetic project and more as "a quality of social experience" we must accept a definition of modernism as widely heterogeneous and variable as the factors that define lived experience: modernism must be rewritten according to every permutation of gender, class, nationality, and geographical inflection imaginable. I am indebted, in writing the following study, to revisionists of modernism who have already begun to explore such a definition, complicating our understanding of modernism and interrogating the literary-historical discursive construction of modernism that has over-determined the absence of writers such as Elizabeth von Arnim from literary history.

I turn first to feminist revisions of modernism, for gender seems a likely place to begin an excavation of von Arnim's place in modernism. The contours of a feminist sociology of modernism have changed a great deal over the last two decades since Janet Wolff complained that the history of modernity and its literature was missing a record of "feminine" experience ("The Invisible Flaneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity" 45). Some feminist critics have focused on staking a claim for women's inclusion in the traditional high modernist canon: for example, playing on the trope of exile so deeply entrenched in high modernism, Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram use their essay anthology, *Women's Writing in Exile* (1989) to account for the absence of women's literary response to modernity as the natural result of women's status as expatriates (literally *ex patria*, excluded from agency and discourse in a patriarchal culture).[8] One might argue, however, that by focusing on integrating women writers into

[8] Geography seems to have been significant in the way that high modernists conceived of themselves and their aesthetic project. For example, modernist writers ranging from Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and James Joyce seem to have been profoundly influenced by their respective geographical displacement and alienation.

the high modern canon as it has been traditionally constituted, Broe and Ingram's study privileges a model of modernism that is inherently sexist: after all, Andreas Huyssen reminds us in his highly influential *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Post-Modernism* (1986) that the monolith we know as high modernism was built around a "powerful masculinist mystique" (46) that tended to exclude women.

In fact, Janet Wolff was demanding more than a history of women's relationship to high modernism in her 1985 article; she was calling for a history of women's socio-cultural negotiations of modernity, an account "of life outside the public realm, of the experience of the 'modern' in its private manifestations, and also of the very different nature of the experience of those women who *did* appear in the public arena. . ." (45 emphasis mine). The absence of such a history helps us to understand how the work of Elizabeth might have been overlooked. She was invested in recording contemporary women's experience of the "modern" in private manifestations ranging from suburban gardening (*Elizabeth and her German Garden* 1898) and ready-to-serve baby formula (in *The Pastor's Wife* 1914) to cosmetics (in *Love* 1925) and all-female holidays (in *The Enchanted April* 1921). Considering her subject matter, perhaps it is not surprising that Elizabeth has not registered as historically valuable enough to merit inclusion in literary historical accounts of the period. But what kind of historiography is required to help us fill in the blanks left by traditional accounts of modernism? In "Writing on the Cultural Rim," Shari Benstock suggests that feminist critics have, by and large, been "looking for signs of the female modernist experience in all the wrong places" (30). Benstock observes that the most fruitful site for excavating a female modernism is less likely to be the margins of a male modernism than the centre of women's historical experience of

modernity, an observation which prompts her to suggest that what feminist literary historians now require "is a critical practise that combines close textual analysis with a renewed and revised literary and cultural history of modernism" (30).[9] The work of Elizabeth von Arnim provides an opportunity for literary historians to undertake the critical practise outlined by Benstock, combining "close textual analysis" and "a renewed and revised literary and cultural history of modernism" (30) in order to reveal women's experiences of modernity. Rather than reading the domestic woman writer as a marginalized modernist, Elizabeth von Arnim offers us a unique opportunity to read modernity as it was read by contemporary readers, as an extremely heterogeneous field of discourses which included a range of responses to the modern experience. It is only by denaturalizing our aesthetic expectations, as Margaret Cohen explains, that we are able to take forgotten literature and the lost aesthetics which informed it "on its own terms" (21) rather than seeing it, by default, through the hegemonic perspective of the high modernist aesthetic that has largely dictated our history of twentieth-century literature.

Feminist revisionists of modernism have attuned us, for instance, to the nearly extinct tradition of domestic sentimentalism as a response to modernity. In her book *Sentimental Modernism*, Suzanne Clark argues that high modernism was responsible for inverting previous literary values, suppressing traditional literary discourses such as sentimentalism and privileging, instead, discourses of rupture and newness. It is important to note here that in speaking of sentimentalism, Clark takes a distinctly

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[9] Benstock had already begun to enact such a critical practice in her study *Women of the Left Bank* (1986). Early steps toward such a critical practice are also evident in Bonnie Kime Scott's ambitious two-volume *Gender of Modernism* (1990), in which she and others postulate the existence of a distinctly female literary modernism consisting of uncanonized genres and domestic themes: in one essay, for example, Jane Marcus recommends the genres of autobiography as a potentially-productive, if highly unorthodox, register in which to read women's literary responses to modernism. Marcus cites Antonia White as one exemplar of a successful modernist writer whose career was a "lifelong attempt to write her life as a woman" (Scott 598).

feminist stance by linking sentimentalism with domestic discourse. Following the seminal work of Nancy Armstrong in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987), Clark's sentimentalism is sourced in the family and its historical transition from an economic unit to a privatized household held together by bonds of affection and deeply invested in discourses of emotions and morality. As custodians of the home and cultivators of the family, women were seen to hold a privileged role in the rhetoric and aesthetic of sentimentality. Women's privileged relationship with the sentimental meant that when a modernist *avant-garde* began to define itself through an "adversarial" relationship with sentimental and domestic culture at the turn of the century and beyond, not just sentimentalism but women's domestic culture in general came to be seen as "a past to be outgrown and a present tendency to be despised" (2). Women's domestic culture was automatically rendered passé and démodé compared with the relatively autonomous *avant-garde* aesthetic which professed disdain for emotive, commercial, and socio-political interests. Considering this legacy of modern anti-sentimentalism, the neglect of Elizabeth's work by literary historians should, again, come as little surprise. Not only are her novels consistently set in domestic space, but they also pursue narratives of family relations, romance, and home life. Furthermore, Elizabeth invested heavily in domestic forms, her first few novels, for example, taking the form of domestic diaries recounting a woman's daily experiences in her home and garden. The literary history that I offer in the following chapters depends heavily on the existence of a domestic modernism to restore von Arnim and writers like her to our accounts of modernism. It is my hope that such a history may in fact contribute to the project outlined by Clark in her book, of restoring to women, in the shape of the sentimental and the domestic, "a form, a set of

tropes, and a rhetorical stance" fundamental not only to women's historical identity, but to their present arsenal of discursive transgression.

Another distinctively female register of modernism explored by feminist revisionary historians is the consumption of material culture. In the whimsically-titled study *As Long as It's Pink*, Peggy Sparke recognizes that though modern women's material consumption has traditionally been seen by feminists as a passive phenomenon—a symptom of women's cultural inferiority to the mostly male producers of modernism—in fact, the sphere of consumption may be seen as a highly enabling arena for women's agency. "[I]t is only over-emphasis on male production in the work place in most social-historical accounts of this period," she argues, that "has clouded our picture of feminine culture, thus helping to marginalize [women's role] in nineteenth-century productive and cultural life" (29-30). The sexist slant of such a history, Sparke claims, blinds us to women's roles as producers of modernism in the aesthetic arena through consumption.[10] Far from being passive, modern consumption involves a complex process of translating values into concrete forms. In this sense, women must be credited with having produced "the material backcloth of modern life" by permanently influencing "the food we eat, the music we listen to, the books we read, the way we adorn ourselves, and the manner in which we modify the physical spaces we inhabit" (1). In fact, importantly for my study, women must largely be credited with transforming consumption into an art, and in so doing, developing the distinctly modern art of lifestyle, an aspect of cultural modernism that has been grossly neglected by its historians.

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[10] This is especially true in terms of our history of literary modernism, focusing as it does on matters of literary production and neglecting the reception of such literary products. I take up this matter below.

For explanation of this neglect, one need look no further than the prejudices of a high modern critical establishment that tended, in the words of Linda Nochlin, to judge "[art] which is removed from actuality [as], by definition, the most aesthetically valuable" (qtd in Wallace & Elliot 38). In pointing out the significance of the practices and aesthetics of women in modern domestic life, Sparke offers feminist historians a means by which to counter this historical prejudice, excavating a buried history of women's lifestyle, as well as literary, practises from the turn of the century. As the following chapters will reveal, this is an especially important concern when studying the *fin de siècle*, a period in which the middle-classes displayed an unprecedented concern with the aesthetics of daily life, from gardening to home décor.

Alison Light reinforces the significance of attending to the "private" innovations associated with women's experiences of modernity in *Forever England*, a study that extends the investigation of a modernism "linked with the everyday, the commercial and the aesthetically 'impure'" (ix).[11] Any number of modern household aids ranging from liquid cleaners to tumble-dryers transformed the private sphere at the turn of the century, but the impact of these innovations has been seen to be just that: private. Light argues for the value of attending to such private innovations in a feminist study of modernism.[12] Another of Light's key contributions to the field is a focus on literary reception. Though she studies women's lives and literature from a slightly later period, I have benefited from her focus on interwar women's patterns of reading as key to understanding the work of Elizabeth, which similarly turns up the volume on this "silent" register of private

[11] Light's study of the "private" innovations associated with women's experiences of modernity include such hidden innovations as the disposable sanitary napkin, though I would point out that the technology need not be literally out of sight to feature as socially invisible (10).
[12] Class is, admittedly, a complicating factor in this discussion—after all, not all women could afford to adopt modern technology on the homefront. I begin to tease out these complications below.

innovations and practices from the late 1890s to the early 1940s. From women's gardening and domestic practises in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (1898) to female leisure innovations in *The Caravaners*[13], Elizabeth's work records the manner in which a sector of contemporary British women responded to the maelstrom of modern life by developing a modern art of domestic living. Light's study is also noteworthy for introducing the crucial factor of conservatism to previous discussions of how women negotiated modernity. Light finds female social history to be bound up with a complex political negotiation that she calls "conservative modernism," which, "Janus-faced, . . . could simultaneously look backwards and forwards" and "could accommodate the past in new forms of the present" (10). Light explains that female culture has been elided from accounts of modernism in part because while *avant garde* discourses tended to equate modernism with change and flux, sentimental and domestic discourses tended to cast women as guardians of continuity and conservers of tradition; as a result, femininity came to be perceived as ideologically conservative, anti-modern, and opposed to progress. Domestic literature was thus seen uncritically to preserve the conventions of the past, rather than strategically to maintain aspects of the past to mitigate the drawbacks—as well as extend the benefits—of the present.[14]

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[13] Elizabeth's *The Caravaners* is particularly noteworthy in terms of Light's discussion, for it demonstrates the important convergences of conservatism, femininity and nationalism with modernity in a period which significantly predates Light's interwar focus. Picking up on the trend of caravanning as a conservative response to modernity's alienation from nature through developments of automotive transport, Elizabeth transforms the leisure activity into both a politically progressive activity for contemporary feminists as well as a new genre for writers of women's and children's fiction, a development I plan to discuss in my post-doctoral study, "Writing (The) Women's Movement: Motoring, Caravanning, and Women's Literature of the *Fin de Siècle*".

[14] In fact, she argues that the domestic project of cultural conservation was strongly aligned with conservatism as a political project: many women's negotiation of modernism was strongly influenced by a Tory tradition (and thus a conservative impulse) because, more than socialism, political conservatism valued domesticity and reserved a sacred place in its narrative of national life for the mother and homemaker. While modernist scholars have considered the relationship between high modernism and fascism, Light's study fills a significant gap by discussing the relationship between modernism and a fairly

The feminist revisions of modernism outlined above have also functioned as an impetus to consider broader historical projects of recuperating the continuities between modernist culture and the culture that preceded it. All three remind us that the modernist aesthetic of autonomy, by privileging a model of rupture over one of continuity, led to the severing of modern culture's ties to its past: by purporting to be a movement without history or precedent, literary modernism effectively buried its own genealogy, leaving us with a significantly impoverished historical record of the relationship between modernist literature and the literary culture that preceded it. Unfortunately, the privileging of a historical model of rupture is still reflected in the institutionalized practices of periodization extant in literary studies. The necessity of breaking up an area of study into useful and manageable groupings is a necessary evil of any discipline; however, the fact that scholars still tend to break up the study of literature since 1800 under the headings of 'Victorian' and 'Modernist' studies suggests the degree to which a high modern account of literary history has influenced the institutionalization of literary studies. Admittedly, *fin-de-siecle* studies have begun to find a place within the academic community, but the study of so-called Edwardian literature—the literature of the turn of the century and its first decade—still suffers from the legacy of high modernist aesthetic politics. As Carola

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valued domesticity and reserved a sacred place in its narrative of national life for the mother and homemaker. While modernist scholars have considered the relationship between high modernism and fascism, Light's study fills a significant gap by discussing the relationship between modernism and a fairly moderate Tory conservatism. Alongside women's experience of modernity, Light argues, conservatism as a political discourse "is still largely awaiting its historians" (xx). Intriguingly, though, Light insists that the history of women's relationship with conservatism can only be appreciated in light of modern nationalism. While internationalism has seemed to be an important trope in high modern aesthetic production, nationalism seems an equally important trope in conservative modernism. True to form, Elizabeth von Arnim's investment in a conservative and domestic brand of modernism is associated with an increasingly pervasive late nineteenth and early twentieth century discourse of English nationalism that represented England as essentially domestic, antiquated, and rural. Light helps us understand, then, how a modern English identity was forged in even the most unexpected and private corners of women's modern domestic life and literature.

Kaplan and Anne Simpson point out in their book, *Seeing Double: Revisioning Edwardian and Modernist Literature*, contemporary avant-garde representations of the early twentieth-century literary field have largely stigmatized writers identified with the Edwardian period—writers such as Elizabeth von Arnim.[15]

Though Edwardian literature is generally defined by a period of time rather than by a set of aesthetic and rhetorical practices, it had something in common with sentimental literature: both provided the avant-garde with an adversary against which to define itself. Many writers active in the Edwardian period were constructed in high modern manifestoes as immediate rivals, denigratingly characterized as "well-meaning, socially-conscious hacks" and "simple-minded liberals obsessed with thematic issues at the expense of artistic considerations" (Kaplan and Simpson viii). In his high modernist polemic "The New Sculpture," Ezra Pound exemplifies this tendency, expressing disgust with Edwardian artists and their "assorted panaceas," "general acquiescence" and "perfect manners," qualities repugnant to the new avant-garde "aristocracy of the arts" (qtd in Ardis 114). Virginia Woolf also dismisses Edwardian aesthetics in "Mr. Bennett & Mrs. Brown," arbitrarily dating the birthday of modern aesthetic consciousness "in or about December 1910" (5). As a relic of the old order, literary Edwardianism was thus deemed hopelessly passé, criticized by Woolf particularly for its naïve social activism: she complains that Edwardian writers harp on causes, "preach doctrines [and] sing songs" (324), "depend on the world outside the book," and make the reader feel that "in order to complete [their novels] it seems necessary to do something—to join a society, or, more desperately, to write a cheque" (xi). Virginia Woolf also includes the following in her list

[15] Unfortunately, even when "Edwardianism" is strictly defined as a pre-World War I literary period, its history has been reduced to the patriarchal trinity of Bennett, Galsworthy and Wells, eliding factors of gender and genre during this period.

of complaints about the Edwardians: they were misguided politically, "taking upon [their] shoulders the work that ought to have been discharged by Government officials" (148); they were "materialists", sacrificing the spiritual for the "crudity" and "coarseness" of everyday life (148); they were conventional, "perseveringly. . . constructing. . . two and thirty chapters" (149); and they were particularly preoccupied with "the fabric of things": in their literature, "[e]very sort of town is represented, and innumerable institutions," she claims, including all manner of "effort and industry' (qtd in Kaplan and Simpson xii). In the matter of Edwardian writers, Woolf concludes, "the sooner [we] turn[our] back upon them . . . the better" (qtd in Kaplan and Simpson 147).

Considering the vehemence of their critics' disgust, perhaps it is not surprising that Edwardian writers such as von Arnim have dropped out of literary history, their contribution to twentieth-century letters forgotten in the flushed excitement of high modernism's "arrival".[16] Problematically, many proponents of Edwardian aesthetics, far from denying accusations such as Woolf's, cheerfully identified themselves with the project of literature as a social instrument. H.G. Wells, a writer frequently identified with Edwardian literature, explained to Henry James the difference he perceived to exist between Edwardian and modernist literature: "To you, literature, like painting, is an end[;] to me literature like architecture is a means, [and. . .] has a use" (qtd in Bradbury 65). Indeed, Edwardian writers tended to be explicit about such instrumentalization, as exemplified by the recipient of Virginia Woolf's abuse in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown":

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[16] Unfortunately, as Kaplan and Simpson suggest, the sidelining of Edwardian literature has been completed by myopic scholarly studies that have contributed to popular misconceptions about Edwardians and their work (147-9). In a 1986 study entitled *The Edwardian Temperament 1895-1919*, Jonathan Rose characterizes the Edwardians as lacking "rigorous thought" and "philosophical integrity" (ix; 210). Rose's Edwardians are thus collectively characterized as "slack" thinkers with "soft center[s]," in contrast with their Modernist successors who have often been praised for their impenetrable intellectualism and rigid resistance to social and literary convention (210-1).

alongside his more overtly "literary" work, Arnold Bennett also published a "sideline of unabashedly commercial how-to books on time management, the formation of literary taste, and marital relations" (Kaplan and Simpson 225). Thus an Edwardian aesthetic seems strikingly similar to the feminist aesthetics already discussed, in the sense that all were seen to be invested in the idea of literature as a potent instrument of social practise, an investment that was significantly depreciated with the ascent of literary modernism.

The fact that the Edwardians' sense of the literary was indivisible from the social is much more significant to the development of both literary modernism and modern lifestyle aesthetics than the *avant-garde* was ever willing to admit. Jane Eldridge Miller goes so far as to assert that Edwardian literary practise was what made formal modernism possible. In *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism, and the Edwardian Novel*, Miller sees high modern writing, its formal innovation and subjective themes, as the natural outcome of developments in Edwardian women's political status in the late nineteenth century. When *fin-de-siecle* and Edwardian writers with feminist sympathies discovered the political potential of the naturalist novel, they employed it as a vehicle for protesting the restriction of women's sexual and economic freedoms; however, finding that traditional generic conventions severely limited the degree to which they could approach topics such as marriage, some turned to new genres (particularly the short story), while others restructured the novel to suit a growing view that marriage might constitute an opening crisis in a couple's life as much as a happy ending. Thus Miller argues that the work of Edwardians such as May Sinclair, Arnold Bennett, E. M. Mayor, and Elizabeth von Arnim, among others, not only shifted discursive value from a male-dominated public sphere to the "ordinary" sphere of women's daily domestic experiences, but also

pioneered the thematic and formal developments which laid the groundwork for high literary modernism. Miller's argument about Edwardian generic experimentation is very much in keeping with the description of Edwardian aesthetics offered in *Edwardian Fiction: An Oxford Companion* by David Trotter, Sandra Kemp, and Charlotte Turner, who identify mixed genre as a hallmark of Edwardian literature and credit Edwardian writers with the practice of an extremely productive generic promiscuity.

Elizabeth's alignment with Edwardian aesthetics provides us with another clue to her absence from the history of literary modernism. To be fair, the clue had already been detected by Frank Swinnerton in his memoir, *Figures in the Foreground* (1970), in which he contrasts von Arnim's career with that of her much younger cousin, Katherine Mansfield, a writer whose literary fortunes have fared considerably better in accounts of literary modernism:

> Katherine Mansfield had been associated during her literary life with the world of "arty" people and small or restricted artistic periodicals, from *The New Age* and *Rhythm* to Murry's *Athenaeum*. Elizabeth Russell's fortune lay among the genteel, among prosperous journals for women; her last book, after being serialised, was made a Book of the Month choice in America. Katherine died young, and was exalted. Elizabeth lived to be over seventy and to look back with regret upon her own work[. . .]. She would nowadays be dismissed by the intellectually smug as "commercial"; but the word was never used of her while she lived. Manners were better then. She herself practised towards other writers the tolerance natural to her generation. (60-1)

The binary opposition Swinnerton constructs between Katherine Mansfield's "arty" and exclusive work and Elizabeth's "genteel" and "commercial" work is certainly explicable within the context of high modernism's self-identification as generational rivals that defined their own project by dismissing the work and aesthetics of their Edwardian forebears. Indeed, Elizabeth's identification with an Edwardian literary project seems fairly clear. Her corpus demonstrates the productive generic promiscuity which Trotter has identified as a hallmark of Edwardian aesthetic practice: she worked in a variety of genres, including romance, children's literature, gothic fiction, dramatic adaptation, and autobiography to name just a few. In fact, her familiarity with a range of genres seems to have facilitated Elizabeth's fascinating experimentation with generic hybrids. One of her earlier works, *The April Baby's Book of Tunes* (1900), was a curious amalgam of musical notation and narrative, relating the story of Elizabeth's attempt to entertain her housebound children one cold spring by composing tunes for nursery rhymes, tunes which were then embedded in the text. Not only did Elizabeth merge the novel and the children's fairy tale in *Princess Priscilla's Fortnight*, but, with J. M. Barrie as consultant, she successfully adapted the 1905 novel for the stage (*Priscilla Runs Away*), leading to a well-received run at the Haymarket Theatre in 1910 (Usborne 145).[17] The epistolary form was similarly fruitful for Elizabeth, who was encouraged by positive reviews of her letter-novel *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther (1907)* to experiment with the form,

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[17] Buoyed by her success, Elizabeth went on to adapt another novel, *The Benefactress*, for the stage. Entitled *Ellen in Germany*, the stage play version of *The Benefactress* changed the romantic hero's imprisonment into the outbreak of WWI; however, when Elizabeth showed the completed project to a theatrical agent in 1916, she was told that there was no market during war time for a play which involved romance between an English woman and a German man (Usborne 198) She frequently contemplated writing an 'experimental' play, which was "to have tiny scenes, none lasting longer than five minutes, and with Bach fugues in between," though she never again engaged seriously in producing work for the stage (Usborne 223).

enlisting friends ranging from Bertrand Russell to Hugh Walpole to collaborate with her on a fictional epistolary exchange intended for publication as a novel, a project that, unfortunately, never reached fruition.[18] Arguably the most important experiment with genre, and the one that this study examines in some depth, was her first bestseller, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898), a novel which brought together the gardening manual, the diary, and the New Woman novel into a narrative form that appeared to defy traditional literary conventions. In typical Edwardian style, von Arnim's fiction also evidences her commitment to literature's socio-political impact. In a period of tumult regarding women's social and political roles in England, she often wrote fiction as a form of feminist intervention, and in so doing, she offers an effective illustration of Miller's model of generic innovation as a result of changes in women's socio-political status. In exemplifying the Edwardian dedication to literature as a social project, Elizabeth's work constitutes a valuable resource for literary historians interested in recuperating a distinctly Edwardian response to the challenges and opportunities of modernity.

Modernism, Class Politics, and the Middlebrow

One final key to the recuperation of writers such as Elizabeth von Arnim may be found in a comment made by popular Edwardian writer Arnold Bennett. Having had his work attacked by Virginia Woolf in "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Bennett retreated behind a discourse of aesthetic class distinctions: "Woolf," he explained, "is the queen of the high-brows; and I am a low-brow".[19] I add this discourse of class and social

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[18] Inspired by the spirited correspondence between Goethe and Bettina von Arnim, von Arnm published *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther (1907)*, a novel composed as a series of letters between Rose-Marie, the daughter of a German Professor, and Mr. Anstruther, the young Englishman with whom she falls in love. The *Evening News* credited her novel with "an insight into life which makes the author one of the finest, if not the finest of present day writers" (qtd in Usborne 118).

[19] Bennett is quoted by Kaplan and Simpson, p. 225.

distinction to the revisionist readings of modernism above because, in my mind, it constitutes an important missing factor in the gendered and generational revision of modernism discussed thus far: class. I am not alone in this sense. Certainly this is Nicola Humble's contention in *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel, 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (2001), in which Humble insists that studies of women and modernism such as Light's *Forever England* wrongly neglect issues of class and social distinction as explicit and important factors in the definition of women's modern experience and responses. Writing a decade after Light, Humble claims that any study of women's literary consumption in the interwar years is incomplete without an engagement with the concept of the "middlebrow"(1-2), a term which has become increasingly popular for characterizing certain interactions between class and aesthetics over the course of the twentieth century. Humble understands why Light is loathe to employ the term, admitting that "'[m]iddlebrow' has always been a dirty word": since its coinage in the late 1920s, she notes, the term has been applied to cultural products considered to be "too easy, too insular, [and] too smug' (1). Humble laments that, "[w]hile the lowbrow has undergone a process of critical reclamation in recent decades. . .with the development of popular culture studies," the middlebrow, in contrast, remains "firmly out in the cold" (1). In fact, this omission of the middlebrow from cultural history may help to explain why Elizabeth von Arnim has been left out of received accounts of literary modernism. It is to the middlebrow, then, that I direct our attention in the next chapter.

Chapter One
Modernism, Class, and the Problem of the Middlebrow

The problem of Elizabeth von Arnim's absence from literary history is, in many ways, linked with the problem of class and aesthetic distinction in twentieth-century culture, especially as manifested in the concept of the middlebrow. History tends to be written by posterity's survivors, and contemporary highbrow culture, which has lived on in the form of literary criticism and has enjoyed the benefit of posterity in the literary histories of the period, effectively vilified the middlebrow for much of the twentieth century. Certainly middlebrow fiction, like the conservatively-modern work of women analyzed by Alison Light, suffered denigration at the hands of an *avant-garde* establishment. The commentary of prominent writers and critics of the interwar period certainly confirms the term's abusive connotations. A scathing critique of the "middlebrow" was levelled by Virginia Woolf in a 1942 letter to a newspaper editor, in which she less than graciously defined the middlebrow as a "mixture of geniality and sentiment stuck together with a sticky slime of calves-foot jelly" (15). Determined to add her two cents to the "Battle of the Brows," Woolf declared her unstinting support for lowbrow and highbrow culture, which she saw as coexisting in a natural, symbiotic, and mutually-beneficial relation: "lowbrows need highbrows and honour them just as much as highbrows need lowbrows and honour them," Woolf explains, because lowbrows "do things" and highbrows, because they think rather than "do," have the opportunity to reflect for lowbrows, through art, what their "doings" actually look like (14). The middlebrows, however, she dismisses as "busybodies who run from one to the other with their tittle tattle and make all the mischief" (13, 14). She continues:

> They are neither one thing nor the other. They are not highbrows, whose brows are high; nor lowbrows, whose brows are low. Their brows are betwixt and between. . . The middlebrow is the man or woman of middle-bred intelligence who ambles and saunters now on this side of the hedge, now on that, in pursuit of no single object, neither art itself nor life itself, but both mixed indistinguishably, and rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige. (15)

Neither hot nor cold, the middlebrow is found by Virginia Woolf to be lukewarm, and she thus recommends it for expulsion from contemporary British cultural life.

Though slightly less vituperative than Woolf, Q. D. Leavis was also deeply critical of the middlebrow. In *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932), Leavis undertook an "anthropological" approach to what she saw as the problem of contemporary readers' falling tastes: she asserted that literary critics should look beyond novels themselves to the history and institutions surrounding their reception in order to determine why "the general reading public of the twentieth century is no longer in touch with the best literature of its own day, or of the past" (235). She blamed the "middlemen" of literature in particular—critics, extensive review columns, and Book Clubs—for the decay of Britain's readership: "not just cheap weekly reviews," she claims, "but 'safe' and helpful review organs such as *The Times Literary Supplement*, [and] standardised institutions such as Book Society and the Book Guild . . . [have] established and organized a middlebrow standard of values and in so doing, [have] spoilt the public for fiction in book form of a more serious nature" (32).[1]

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[1]To her credit, Leavis was one of the first literary critics to recognize the need for a study of reception and the politics of taste. She also recognized the complexity of such a study, the "tangle of pregnant issues," which emerge when we begin to raise "questions of standards and values [. . .] which bear on the whole history of taste" (xiii-iv).

Though he addressed it by a different name, American journalist Dwight MacDonald's critique of "Midcult" made Woolf's sound benign ("Masscult and Midcult" 1952). "[I]n these advanced times," MacDonald warned, the purity of high culture was being endangered not by mass culture, but by "the tepid ooze of midcult," a "peculiar hybrid bred from the latter's unnatural intercourse with the former," resulting in the emergence of "a whole middleculture. . . [which] threatens to absorb both its parents" (54). According to MacDonald, Midcult sullied both poles of culture by wanting to "ha[ve] it both ways," appropriating mass cultural components such as "the formula, the built-in reaction, the lack of any standard except popularity," while simultaneously "water[ing]. . . down and vulgariz[ing]" high cultural standards (37). Thus MacDonald called readers to reject the cultural formation he refers to, by turns, as "the enemy outside the walls" (37), and "the dangerous opponent" (51).

Thanks to such vitriol, it was not until the advent of cultural studies several decades later that critics declared a general ceasefire on middlebrowism. "The long-term derogation of the middlebrow. . .has gone much too far," asserted Tad Friend in the 1980s, pointing out the degree to which the banality, hybridity, and sentiment damned by the middlebrow's critics could just as easily be celebrated as "modesty of scope," 'technical competence," and "purity of emotion"; in fact, he credits the middlebrow with an aesthetic accommodation that has not properly been appreciated for its role as an agent of culture over the twentieth century (qtd in Mangum 18).

Violent past responses to the middlebrow do not necessarily provide us with a definition of the concept, however; certainly they do not provide us with a definition that

the middlebrow's apologists would recognize. Attempts have been made to provide a more balanced understanding of the concept. For example, one definition of the middlebrow relates it directly to the tastes of those social groups positioned near the middle of the social hierarchy: the "middle-classes". The problem with *equating* the middlebrow *directly* with "the middleclass" is that, not only has the latter been notoriously difficult to define as a uniform demographic group, but gender, market pressures, class aspiration and class perception must also be considered as factors in the development of cultural tastes. In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of middlebrow culture, a few scholars have rejected the task of defining "the middlebrow" per se, preferring to describe its effects in particular cultural and aesthetic fields. For example, in her aforementioned study, Nicola Humble discusses the way in which class aspiration appears to have taken literary form in the development of a feminine middlebrow novel in the interwar years. According to Humble, the phenomenon of the "middlebrow novel" developed when, with the advent of modernity, a newly-emergent sector of the reading public found in the novel an instrument by which to consolidate and legitimate an aesthetic more closely corresponding to their own experiences, priorities, and values—experiences, priorities and values that were *perceived* to be middle-class in orientation.[2] According to Humble, there did exist an actual expansion in the interwar years of a middle class that was "more affluent" and "newly leisured"(Humble 10); this growth was attended by the emergence of *a new kind of reading public* who demanded a

[2] Like any discussion of class aspiration, Humble's study owes much to the work of Pierre Bourdieu, who has elaborated a model for discussing the construction, contesting, and policing of social stratification along the lines of arbitrary but powerful aesthetic judgements. Bourdieu's discussion on this count is developed most fully in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. I will take up his arguments in greater detail in Chapter One.

form of fiction uniquely designed to "appeal to the changing identity and tastes of its expanding and altering class" (12). The form of such fiction necessarily reflected a medial social position between upper and lower classes, mediating a wish to acquire "highbrow" cultural competence and social-progressiveness and a desire to enjoy the kind of escape from the workaday world that lower-brow literature provided through predictable formulas and adherence to traditional literary conventions. While the middlebrow novel is closely related with middle class interests, experiences, and values, it is important to note here, as an extension of my above caution regarding the relationship between class and taste, that the "medial" effect of the middlebrow novel should not be *directly equated* with the actual class-situation of the reader; in the case of the middlebrow novel, the reader's actual class position was less important than the middle-class subject-position that the book invited its readers to inhabit. Such a caution reminds us that the readerly desires met by the middlebrow novel may well have gone "both ways" in terms of the actual social status of its readership: while the history of social mobility has tended to naturalize a tendency to assume that class aspiration always follows an upward trajectory, the middlebrow novel, in glamorizing a middle-class way of life, may have held an appeal for readers across class—an appeal which will, perhaps, become more clear as I return to a discussion of Elizabeth von Arnim in the coming chapters. At this point, however, perhaps it is sufficient to say that the middlebrow novel aimed at creating a genre pitched somewhere between mindless consumption and highly-cultivated taste, suggestively offering readers a literary technology to accomplish both. In Humble's words, then,

> the middlebrow novel is one that straddles the divide between the trashy romance or thriller on the one hand, and the philosophically or formally challenging novel on the other: offering narrative excitement without guilt, and intellectual stimulation without undue effort. It is an essentially parasitical form, dependent on the existence of both a high and a lowbrow for its identity, reworking their structures and aping their insight, while at the same time fastidiously holding its skirts away from lowbrow contamination, and gleefully mocking highbrow intellectual pretensions. (12)

The middlebrow novel was expected to provide both readerly pleasure and a sophistication of form and content without abdicating a traditionally-perceived middle class commitment to promoting humanistic ideals and social consciousness. Specimens of this new form ranged in quality, but all laid claim to the status of respectability through a universal appeal to authenticity. In a study that complements Humble's, Rosa Maria Bracco explains that such middlebrow values account for the high degree to which such novels tended to be "unashamedly autobiographical," drawing on the "real life" experiences of the author (*Merchants of Hope* 11). Often implicit in such auto-biographical fiction was an invitation for readers to project their own lives into the fiction. In demonstrating self-mastery through narrative, the authors of middlebrow fiction were demonstrating the power of literature as a cultivating force for an entire class of readers.

Middlebrow literature was also implicated in discourses of cultural conservation and sentimentalism as a response to the problems posed by modernity. Humble points out that middlebrow novels were seen to provide sentimental consolation to readers in a

world of increasing internationalism and social alienation by eschewing jarring formal experimentation and choosing, instead, to maintain the traditional nineteenth-century literary structure of "well-rounded narratives, with clearly structured plots and definite endings"; in so doing, these novelists were attempting to build a readership "bound by community values" and "safeguard[ed]" from modern alienation (Humble 5-6).

Rosa Maria Bracco explains such a dynamic in her discussion of post-WWI middlebrowism: "[T]he consolation provided by the sense of continuity in experience is one of the refuges to which people seek most frequent psychological access. Whether the idea of meaningful links in time is illusion or reality, it acts as a powerful cultural agent and cannot be dismissed as an irrelevant accretion of modern perception" (6). Considering the middlebrow's cultural role as nurturer, comforter, and conserver of historical continuity, perhaps it is no wonder that Nicola Humble has asserted a relationship between the middlebrow and the concept Light has defined as conservative modernism. In fact, noting the high degree of correspondence between the two concepts, Humble has suggests that "middlebrow" may actually be a more accurate term than "conservative modernism" to characterize the phenomenon Light describes as "a powerful force in establishing and consolidating, but also in resisting new class and gender identities" (2-3). Both terms are important in the study that follows, however, because while the "middlebrow" is a useful identifier, "conservative modernism" reminds us that the "middlebrow" is in fact a type of cultural modernism, a response to modernity as legitimate as high modern or popular responses. Furthermore, the studies of both Light and Humble help me as I attempt to trace the alignment of gender, class, and genre in Elizabeth's first and bestselling novel, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, examining

the way in which a middlebrow genre might actually work to console, conserve, and cultivate a class of readers.

Sociologists and historians of literature have not limited the definition of the middlebrow to discussions of genres. Many have, quite rightly, conceived of the middlebrow as an entire cultural response to modernity that comprehended a complex network of cultural institutions and agents. Considering the fact that a significant sector of a middleclass readership did not enjoy the luxury of acquiring culture by instinct, such fiction required an efficient and economic delivery mechanism. Possibly the most sophisticated study of the middlebrow in its institutionalized expression is Janice Radway's work on the Book of the Month Club in *A Feeling for Books: the Book-of-the-Month Club, literary taste, and middle-class desire* (1997). An American publishing initiative of the interwar period, the Book of the Month Club brought together high and low cultural discourses of the book in a scheme of cultural entrepreneurialism meant to maximize both financial and social profits. Radway thus elaborates on Humble's genre-based definition of the middlebrow, gesturing to the way in which the middlebrow project could be manifested in cultural institutions. Considering the fact that Radway stresses the development of middlebrow culture as a class-inflected response to modernity, it is no coincidence that in her discussion of the Club, she employs terms we have already come to identify with modernism's revision, terms like conservation, cultivation, consolation, and consumption. For the history of the middlebrow is, I would argue, a history of cultural modernism that takes into consideration matters of gender, sentimentality, cultural materialism, and political orientation. By defining the middlebrow as a conservative and consumer-oriented cultural innovation that manifested itself in literary

and institutional forms, Radway and Humble's arguments confirm my sense that a class-based revision of the history of modernism is the one most likely to account for the work and career of Elizabeth von Arnim. Indeed, von Arnim and her work seem to have been identified by contemporaries with the interests of a social class characterized as "betwixt and between". Near the end of her career, the *Times* noted its appreciation of Elizabeth von Arnim's characteristic "knowledge of dames of high and not so high degree" (review of *The Jasmine Farm* 20 Nov 1934). It was a knowledge gained from personal experience. Born into a middle class colonial family and subsequently marrying into privileged German and British society, von Arnim was ideally situated to observe and mediate between "high and not so high" society.[3] Despite her movement, through marriage, to a higher social status than the strictly middle-class one to which she was born, she was, herself, a middle class consumer and a proponent of life lived on middlebrow principles, implicated in consumption not only of middlebrow fiction, but of literature ranging indiscriminately between higher and lower-brow traditions: her diaries and letters, for example, reveal a taste ranging from P.G. Wodehouse to Proust. She cultivated a taste for literary classics. Claiming Montaigne, Wordsworth, Whitman and Thoreau as her inspiration, Jane Austen and Bettina von Arnim as her literary heroes, von Arnim cultivated a relatively conservative literary aesthetic; however, she prided herself on a discriminating and even irreverent attitude towards her literary forebears that certainly aligned her with that "modern" project concerned with flouting its immediate precursors. She complained, for instance, that Ruskin "displayed a ladylike arch[ness]" which she "couldn't endure," while Trollope's *Autobiography* inspired her to declare

[3] Elizabeth was a countess twice by marriage, having married a Prussian junker Henning Graf von Arnim in 1891 and Frances, Count Russell, in 1916.

patronizingly, "Those Victorians"—"most entertaining" but "unconsciously so!" (Diary 10 Mar; 15 Jun 1923). In the matter of contemporary letters, her tastes were similarly eclectic. The highbrows of her day inspired both her praise and her censure. She recommended Strachey to a friend, declaring his work to be "adorably delicious," and of Virginia Woolf, confessed to "read[ing] everything she writes" (Letter to Arthur Frere 7 Sep. 1922; Letter to Kathleen Arnold Christmas 1931). She credited D. H. Lawrence with "a genius and no mistake" (Letter to Kathleen Arnold Christmas 1927). She characterized E. M. Forster as "whimsical, charming, [and] amusing," but wished he would "be serious and not for ever only skating about among the absurdities" (Letter 13 Jun 1923). Dorothy Richardson she though "brilliant and strange"(Diary 21 Apr 1940). James Joyce she found positively unreadable. His masterpiece, *Ulysses*, generated the following response from von Arnim:

> I didn't get far. I see it is a wonderful thing, but nothing will induce me to read a thing—anything—even God's first novel, if it bores me. *Ulysses* made me feel as if I were shut up with a lunatic who was doing what the courts call "exposing himself". I got as far as the detailed account of the man's morning visit to the lavatory and then boredom so profound fell upon me that I went to sleep. Monarch [Sydney Waterlow, her nephew] raves about it. "Marvellous—literature will never be the same—completely revolutionizing," etc. He too sends me to sleep by the excess of his eulogies.[4]

That *Ulysses* may be recognized as "wonderful" and "revolutionizing," a middlebrow reader would be liable to concede; however, in claiming the right to draw the line at coarseness ("no need for lunatics exposing themselves") and to pan literature that flouts

[4] The letter was written to Middleton Murry and quoted by Frank Swinnerton, p.61-2.

the conventions of readerly pleasure ("nothing will induce me to read a thing. . if it bores me"), von Arnim confirms her allegiance to a distinctly middlebrow aesthetic.

That she was a producer, as well as a consumer, of middlebrow literature tends to confirm my sense that Elizabeth von Arnim might productively be discussed in terms of a middlebrow modernism. In contrast to the obscurity and density of *Ulysses*, von Arnim's fiction was known for its "distinctive charm," "unforced wit," and "wholesomeness," her work constituting "a tonic for the dreary minded".[5] Her name became synonymous with vicarious escape and holiday from the workaday world, her heroines exchanging the dreary domestic routine and crippling social obligations of modern daily life for the consolation of the English countryside, the Italian seaside, the valleys of sunny California, or their own gardens. A middlebrow cultural formation helps us to make sense of von Arnim's practice of generic hybridity, by explaining her simultaneous interest in formal experimentation—central in high cultural discourses—with the social instrumentalization of literature—a feature of popular cultural aesthetics. This high/low hybridity is most salient in her first novel, the bestselling *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898), which combines popular genres like the diary novel and the gardening manual with more *avant garde* discourses such as the New Woman novel to create a distinctly middlebrow sub-genre that would help readers cultivate their gardens as well as their aesthetic taste. Furthermore, von Arnim's authorial practise in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* reflected that "authenticity" which its apologists claimed distinguished middlebrow fiction from its lower-brow, escapist counterpart. Much of her work is loosely autobiographical, and von Arnim's biographer Karen Usborne faithfully traces a

[5] Quoted by Usborne, p. 312.

few of correspondences between her life and her work.[6] More important than the correspondence between her work and her life, however, is the fact that Elizabeth von Arnim valued the perception of autobiographical authenticity. Even when heavily fictionalizing her experience, she frequently chose to write in a genre that performed autobiography: the diary. Just like her middlebrow readers—who can never be delimited to strictly middle-class readers—von Arnim was invested in exploring, through fiction, a subjectivity that did not necessarily directly correspond to her own exact life experience.

In discussing her own distinctly middlebrow reading practices, Elizabeth confirms the reader's ideological and financial investment in the middlebrow novel as an agent of readerly cultivation. In fact, a consideration of the marketing and reception of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and its sequels suggests that Elizabeth was deeply implicated in the institutional and market aspects of a middlebrow cultural formation. Elizabeth's work was published by Macmillan and Company, a firm associated with the characteristics we have come to identify with the middlebrow. Her correspondence with Frederick Macmillan in particular suggests she saw literary production as both a literary and an economic investment and she was savvy in her use of marketing to maximize profits in both respects.[7] Elizabeth was also very successful with middlebrow institutions such as the Book of the Month Club: *The Enchanted April* (1922) and *Mr. Skeffington* (1940)—

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[6] One of the only occasions upon which she attempted to depart from autobiography was *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther*, though she did undertake research for the novel, posing for three weeks as a maid in a middle class German house in order to achieve the precise nuances of context and setting. She returned to her autobiographical roots in her later work, however, and the fact that her own experience provided the most immediate source of "authentic" narrative was not lost on fellow middlebrow Hugh Walpole, who contended in his obituary for "Elizabeth" printed in the *Daily Sketch* that all her work was "sooner or later autobiography" (qtd in Usborne 310-12).

[7] Deeply imbued with a sense of tradition—its editorship and management was passed down from generation to generation of the MacMillan family—the firm was committed to publishing educational resources ideally suited to earnestly self-ameliorative middlebrow readers. Furthermore, it found itself "betwixt and between" the extremes of publishing options in the period: according to Rosemary T. Van Arsdel, the firm's basic character was largely dependent on both its "sound business [principles]" and its choice of "books 'to last'" (179;181).

were both chosen as club selections. Furthermore, Elizabeth participated in literary organizations that held to middlebrow ideals: she was a member of P.E.N., for example, an organization of professional writers founded in 1921 with stated aims of cultural conservation—"to defend literature against the many threats. . . which the modern world poses"; cultural consolation—"to promote. . .cooperation and understanding among writers"; and cultivation—"to emphasize the central role of literature in the development of world culture".[8]

As I have tried to demonstrate over the course of this chapter, a class-based reading of modernism does appear to offer the perfect paradigm for contextualizing Elizabeth von Arnim and her work; however, it is not a paradigm free from complications. While many of the most important characteristics of von Arnim's work and reception fit a distinctly middlebrow model of modern aesthetics, some patently do not: von Arnim predominantly functioned in an English context, which does not fit the assumption of most key studies of the middlebrow that maintain its distinctly American character; furthermore, she was producing and marketing her work at the *fin de siècle*, many decades before the interwar timelines for the middlebrow proposed by most of its analysts. The similarity between accounts of middlebrow culture and what we know of Elizabeth's literary production and reception is, however, very strong; it is so strong, in fact, that I have, against many reservations, maintained the model of a class-based cultural response to modernity as the most likely context for rehabilitating her work. In so doing, I have discovered unexpected dividends, for the benefits of placing Elizabeth

[8] Though she was a member, she wasn't always impressed with the organization: of the "damned dinner" she attended on May 1, she complained, "[Cannot distinguish m]any unintelligible English speakers from foreigners. Bored stiff. Never again" (Diary 1 May 1923). P.E.N. International is still extant. See its official website at <http://www.pen.org/general.html>.

von Arnim in the context of a middlebrow cultural formation appear to run both ways: while the cultural discourse of the middlebrow significantly helps to explain the "problem" of Elizabeth von Arnim and her role in cultural modernism, Elizabeth von Arnim herself has constituted a fruitful starting point for beginning to challenge received models of the middlebrow. An examination of a *fin-de-siècle* British writer and readership through the lens of middlebrow culture reveals that extant models of the middlebrow are problematically limited, especially in terms of factors like historical and geographical scope. For instance, Dwight MacDonald has claimed, "[t]here is something damnably American about Midcult"(59), and most major studies of the middlebrow have followed such a national characterization. Joan Rubin and Janice Radway's studies, for example, as exhaustive as they are, focus almost entirely on American, rather than British, middlebrow developments.[9] The fact that present studies of the middlebrow tend to characterize it as a peculiarly American phenomenon suggests that a great deal of work still needs to be done to establishing the middlebrow's British inflection. It is important to note, however, that the work of Elizabeth von Arnim also profoundly problematizes our received dating of middlebrow culture. Janice Radway argues that the middlebrow was formed between the World Wars and the *Oxford English Dictionary* tends to support such an argument: its first record of the term's usage dates it to the mid 1920s.[10] Similarly, literary historian Rosa Maria Bracco has argued for the end of WWI as a

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[9] Much has been made of the fact that the terms "lowbrow" and "highbrow" originated in America, "highbrow" first emerging in the 1880s and only slowly being imported to Britain, where it was popularized by H. G. Wells. Robert Graves and Alan Hodges' offer a very brief discussion of the "middlebrow" in *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* 1940). Its polar counterpart, the "low brow," does not appear to have emerged for another two decades.

[10] We do not witness the emergence of a conceptual mediation in Britain until 1925, *Punch* claiming the B.B.C.'s discovery of "a new type"—"the middlebrow"—which "consists of people who are hoping that some day they will get used to the stuff they ought to like" (OED).

significant moment in the development of middlebrow culture, pointing to the advent of Penguin paperbacks as a symptom of middlebrow development and the paper shortages and publishing-house bombings during the Second World War as the end of its heyday (10). However, a "significant moment" should not be mistaken for a point of genesis, a fact underlined by more recent revisionist readings, which have theorized the possibility that middlebrow culture's genesis can be dated before the interwar years. Susan David Bernstein suggests that we can delineate the historical limits of the phrenological cultural model by recalling Victorian developments in anthropology, discourses of primitiveness, and the intersection of both with aesthetic commentary, especially pertaining to sensation novels and their reception in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As Bernstein points out, though the phenomenon of cultural brows only really gained a name in the first few decades of the twentieth century, the model of highly-developed, lowly-developed, and intermediate cultural forms may well have existed implicitly with the introduction of Darwinian evolutionary anthropology and the elaboration of its cross-disciplinary potential (213-41).

I am not alone in my pursuit of nineteenth-century manifestations of middlebrowism: literary historians such as Jonathan Freedman, Nigel Cross, Teresa Mangum, and Ann Ardis have all implicitly asserted, by means of various case studies, that the formation of the middlebrow occurred a least a few decades before the 1920s and 30s. Unfortunately, none of them offer a systematic or theorized approach to their project. Jonathan Freedman turns to George Du Maurier's *Trilby* as a case study in what he calls "middlebrow mania," middlebrow fiction defined, in his formulation, as those bestsellers that "provided a patina of cultural authority to an increasingly status-conscious

segment of the mass audience anxiously seeking social legitimacy through knowledge of 'high culture'" (150). In *The Common Writer: Life in Nineteenth-Century Grub Street*, Nigel Cross sees the development in the 1880s of a literature which was intended to socially-mobilize a mass middleclass readership and which eventually effected an "irrecoverable schism" in the bourgeois literary world: "Where there had been literature," Cross asserts, "there was now middle-brow and high-brow literature" (19). He finds evidence for an early middlebrow formation in the polemical works of Walter Besant, George Gissing, and Edmund Gosse, evidence that suggests at the very least, the anticipation of a high-, middle-, and lowbrow-cultural model. In *Married, Middlebrow, and Militant*, Teresa Mangum detects the hallmarks of middlebrowism in the marketing of Sarah Grand's New Woman narratives of the 1890s: Mangum sees Grand as participating in a publishing context that "shows clear signs of the emergence of concerns and categories that critics and marketing specialists would be routinely calling middlebrow a few decades later" (19). Perhaps, most importantly, Mangum points out that what we are missing from this "earlier" record of middlebrow cultural desire is the "particular desires being met by women writers" within the middlebrow formation (19): she points to the work done by Margaret Beetham—in *A Magazine of Her Own? Domesticity and Desire in the Woman's Magazine, 1800-1914*—and Kate Flint--in *The Woman Reader* ---to demonstrate the degree to which there existed a women's literary culture by the mid-nineteenth century "[flourishing] in all its complexity—as a circuit of readers, writers, publishers, advertisers, specialized publications, and marketing strategies"(20).[11] In "Mapping the Middlebrow in Edwardian England," Ann Ardis

[11] Mangum also looks at the twenty-first century legacy of such an early middlebrow culture, discussing how Grand "assumes a role in the history of middlebrow culture, a culture that remains vital in the United

recommends the work of Netta Syrett (1865-1943), the author of feminist women's and children's fiction, as a springboard for recovering middlebrow culture in its earlier incarnation. Ardis makes her case for the anachronistic use of the term "middlebrow" by claiming that "[t]he etymology of this term should not lead us to conclude. . .that the phenomenon did not exist prior to its naming as such" (116). Significantly, she also argues that an early middlebrowism would have found ample institutional supports, citing contemporary innovations in literary publishing, marketing and distribution (119).[12]

Curiously, though Ardis and others gesture towards the development of a middlebrow formation in the late nineteenth century, few of them offer an extended discussion of how this anachronism might have occurred, nor do they offer accounts of the ways in which the middlebrow developed from the turn of the century until its first official "sighting" at the end of the first world war. The argument could be made that with a career spanning from 1898 to 1940, and early works as strongly demonstrative of middlebrow culture as her later ones, Elizabeth provides a valuable case study for charting the development of a middlebrow cultural formation from its earliest appearance in the late nineteenth century through to the interwar years, for her writing career continued almost uninterrupted through the second decade of the twentieth century, despite the turmoil of WWI. Certainly a longer version of this study would do just that. Because of the parameters of this project, however, I have chosen to focus on Elizabeth's

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States today through the Book of the Month Club, Oprah's Book Club, and the skyrocketing popularity of reading groups" (35).

[12] While I support her claim that Syrett's fiction may represent an early form of middlebrowism, I have trouble agreeing with Ardis's assertion that middlebrowism should be seen as a "counterdiscourse" to literary modernism; it seems slightly more accurate—as well as more productive—to see it, at the very least, as a "concurrent" discourse, which, alongside *many* narratives of modernism, helped to constitute a modern literary field (126).

early works, for it is here that she developed the aesthetic and marketing approaches that would identify her work and career over the following decades. They also offer some of the best examples of middlebrow culture's grounding in a gendered, conservative and consumption-based modernism that extended aesthetic responses to modernity from literature to lifestyle.

In the following chapters, I return to the novel with which von Arnim inaugurated her career, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, and begin to discuss the ways in which middlebrow culture found in genre a vehicle for its ideology and values, for the domestic diary genre—a genre in which von Arnim heavily participated—particularly exemplifies feminine middlebrow investments. To evidence this generic tradition and its encoding of middlebrow ideology I draw on two well-known examples of feminine middlebrow literature of the interwar period—Jan Struther's *Mrs. Miniver* and E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*—before going on to trace the roots of the domestic diary novel tradition in a much earlier manifestation of middlebrow culture at the *fin de siècle*. As we will discover, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* not only exemplifies a few key middlebrow ideological investments –in cultivation, conservation, and consumption—but also demonstrates the fact that the middlebrow was a much older cultural formation than most studies have hitherto suggested. Furthermore, von Arnim's *German Garden* exemplifies the middlebrow's proclivity for generic hybridity, bringing together as it does a number of *fin-de-siècle* literary conventions, including the diary novel and the New Woman novel, as well as a network of discourses about the "art of living" at the *fin de siècle*, arguably the most important being the discourse of suburbanism. Finally, I examine Elizabeth's early work and career with regard to middlebrow culture in its

institutional expression, drawing liberally from Elizabeth's correspondence with her publishers, Macmillan and Company, which offers insight into middlebrow developments in *fin-de-siècle* publishing and book marketing. By comparing and contrasting Elizabeth's interventions in the *fin-de-siècle* book market with those of the Book of the Month Club—an institution often considered to be the middlebrow's interwar institution *par excellence*—I attempt to develop a sense of the historical and institutional range of the middlebrow's expression, such comparisons also revealing a deeper sense of what principles, practices, and discourses have allowed the middlebrow to survive and thrive through much of the twentieth century, including the practice of branding and the discourse of literary celebrity.

Chapter Two
The Art of Reading "Betwixt and Between" - Genre, Gender, and the Middlebrow.

> Kinds are the very life of literature—and truths and strengths come from the complete recognition of them.
>
> -Henry James, preface to *The Awkward Age*, vol. 9 of *The Novels and Tales of Henry James* (1908)

I begin this chapter by returning to the concept that, arguably, sparked my sense that Elizabeth von Arnim might be understood in terms of a middlebrow cultural context: the concept of genre. Literary historians have increasingly recognized the truth of Henry James's nearly century-old observation: that genre—or literary "kind"—is the "very life" of literature and that "the complete recognition" of genre has the potential to reveal the social life of literature and unlock the way in which reading has historically been instrumentalized to define and perpetuate social relations. In her study of the early nineteenth-century French novel, genre historian Margaret Cohen asserts, for example, the ability of genre to "make visible" social struggle. Bringing together the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Fredric Jameson, and Nancy Armstrong, Cohen describes genre as a social contract whose aesthetic code offers "persuasive. . . solutions to urgent social contradiction" (19). Cohen's study is particularly useful to me in my study of Elizabeth von Arnim's work because she claims that genre studies can help us explain the social contradiction of literature *hors d'usage,* literature that though once popular, has since dropped out of circulation or at the very least out of social and canonical favour—literature, in short, like that written by von Arnim. Literary critics, Cohen maintains, are often tempted to dismiss unfamiliar genres as "uninteresting or inferior" when in fact such unfamiliar aesthetic codes are only incoherent or "inferior" in relation to "the aesthetics that have won out" (20). We have already noted the efficiency with which high modernism buried sentimental and domestic literature; it was so systematically

successful that we have lost not only specific examples of sentimental and domestic literature, but the entire aesthetic logic for their existence. This certainly seems to be the case with novels like von Arnim's bestselling debut novel *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, a book whose mammoth popularity in 1898 can only be equaled by the totality of its neglect at the turn of the millennium. It is clear that its charm is lost to many readers a century later. For example, literary critic Thomas Tausky dismisses the novel as the record of one woman's tendency to "gurgle[] incessantly over her flowers" (225). Though he admits the obvious popularity of the novel with *fin-de-siecle* readers, he asserts that the book is "*in reality* an insufferable book: coy, sentimental, mean-spiritedly egotistical and bigoted" (emphasis mine 225). That "in reality" is rather telling about the social struggle at the root of genre; the charm of von Arnim's novel has become incoherent and absurd when considered in light of the modern—or for Tausky, "real"—aesthetic that won out.

Finally, Cohen's study is important to my project not only because she targets literature *hors d'usage*, but because she also suggests a methodology for excavating lost literature: the literary historian needs to "take forgotten literature on its own terms, to discover its "coherent" and "distinctive poetics" and to uncover "the aesthetic logic and ideological force" informing the poetic (20). My first goal, then, has been to contextualize *Elizabeth and her German Garden* within an aesthetic tradition that would have been recognized by von Arnim's contemporary readers. Reviews of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* predictably provided a few clues. The book reviewer for *Nature Notes*, for example, recognized the book as "the youngest of a group of books rather popular with a certain class of readers in the present day" (November 1898). Though the

reviewer never names the genre, he does offer examples of the cohort, among them "Ros Rosarum" and "A Garden of Pleasure" by the Honourable Mrs. Boyle; "Potpourri from a Surrey Garden" by Mrs. Theresa Earle; and "The Confessions of an Amateur Gardener".[1] He also describes their shared conventions:

> All these books resemble each other in certain respects. They all deal with gardens and gardening on a generous scale, gossiped about in an easy, discursive, dilletante fashion, and interlarded with pleasant little domestic touches, and scraps, more or less smart or pertinent, of feminine philosophizing. They are all written by ladies, and in a cultured and graceful style which rarely descends to pedantry or rises to originality, and is not over-weighted—some people may perhaps think is not weighted enough—by the more prosaic details and technicalities of the subject under discussion. They are all, in fact, books of which we can feel that the writing them has afforded a pleasant occupation for the leisure hours of ladies of property; while the reading of them will fulfill the same office for other ladies of the same class. (November 1898)

This unnamed genre intrigued me, written and read as it was by "a certain class" of women, preoccupied with domestic affairs and feminine philosophy, and rendered in a "cultured and graceful style". The review did little, however, to help me make sense of this sub-genre's preoccupation with gardening or, furthermore, the frequency with which its horticultural commentary was offered up in the form of a diary or confessional. For all of the attention such books seem to have generated from contemporary readers "of a

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[1] My search for the author of *Confessions of an Amateur Gardener* yielded nothing. The reviewer probably meant Alice M. Dew-Smith's *Confidences of an Amateur Garden*, published in London, 1897.

certain class," they seem to have generated very little attention since from those in a position to interpret and classify literature in a systematic manner.

Without a name for such a sub-genre, I chose "the domestic diary novel" as a working title for these books. Reticent to re-invent the generic wheel, however, I canvassed genre studies for overlooked forms or categories that might explain the aesthetic logic of these novels. The first sub-genre to recommend itself was that widely-appreciated and greatly under-theorized form, the novel of manners. Surely such a category seemed amorphous enough to accommodate the motley hodge-podge of generic conventions displayed by these *fin-de-siècle* books. I turned to Bege K. Bowers and Barbara Brothers's *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of the Novel of Manners* to determine whether *Elizabeth and her German Garden* was a likely candidate for inclusion in such a category. My initial sense was that, yes, von Arnim's book displayed many of the conventions associated with the novel of manners, presenting, as it does, something of the "social customs, manners, conventions, and habits of a definite class at a particular time and place" (Holman *Handbook of Literature* qtd in Bowers and Brothers 1). There is no question that, with their domestic focus and readers "of a certain class," *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and novels like it, fit into the paradigm of the novel of manners. Furthermore, the inclusion of her book in a tradition that included Jane Austen, George Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, would no doubt have the positive effect of raising von Arnim's literary stock. The term lacked precision, however, and did little to acknowledge the rather unique diary form and horticultural preoccupation of these novels cast in the mode of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Furthermore, I intuitively resisted the inclusion of Elizabeth von Arnim alongside Virginia Woolf in this tradition,

because though they had a great deal in common, there seemed a fundamentally different sensibility in the writers' respective work. One need look no further for evidence of this difference than Virginia Woolf's comments on von Arnim's *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr. Anstruther* (1907), a book for which the *Times Literary Supplement* had commissioned her review. Though the published form of the review was strongly critical of the book as "merely a record of personal impressions" that are "without form, often shallow, sometimes slipshod, and never inspired", Woolf complained in a letter to Violet Dickinson that her original version—"long and vigorous"—had in fact been "tamed" by the Times: "I wanted to scourge that Fine Lady the Baroness," Woolf wrote, dismissing the book entirely—"it is chatter and trash" (*Collected Letters 1904-12* no.363). Though such a review suggests the Woolf's disrespect for von Arnim's particular aesthetic achievement, it does not clearly and objectively articulate the fundamentally different aesthetic investments of the two writers. More reliable testimony, perhaps, is provided by a contemporary, Mary Agnes Hamilton, who recounts the following conversation with Woolf in her memoirs, *Remembering My Good Friends*:

> She asked, What makes one write? I said that, with me, it was an intense interest in people and an itch to understand what made them go; she looked puzzled, shook her head. People, she said, did not much interest her; what did was the feel of life as it passed—that was what she wanted to render. [. . .] A suspicion which had visited me before became a certainty: Virginia did not really care for me; I was, for her, a specimen of that, to her, queer object—the normal human being. Of such, she really did not know many. (143)

Hamilton had put her finger on the difference I intuited between a tradition that included Virginia Woolf and one that focused on "the normal human being" (24). At about this time, I also encountered Nicola Humble's book on the feminine middlebrow, in which the author explores an aesthetic aligned with those values of "the normal" and "the ordinary" described by Hamilton. I began to wonder if Humble's concept of the feminine middlebrow might offer a model for understanding Elizabeth von Arnim's work.

Commonly featuring "a particular concentration on feminine aspects of life, a fascination with domestic space, a concern with courtship and marriage, [and] a preoccupation with aspects of class and manners" (12), the feminine middlebrow novel's "overriding concern [was] with the home" (6). Humble had not only given a name to the constellation of aesthetic conventions I noticed in *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, but had also suggested the social logic at work in this sub-genre, noting that such a novel offered a solution to the social contradiction of middle-class women's position in the home with the advent of modernity. Such novels, Humble maintains, "combined an enjoyable feminine 'trivia' of clothes, food, family, manners, romance, and so on, with an element of wry self-consciousness that allowed the reader to drift between ironic and complicit readings" (5). In so doing, the feminine middlebrow novel served a particular purpose for middle-class women: according to Humble, such novels "worked through the middleclass woman's anxieties about her new responsibility for domestic labour, and helped to redefine domesticity as stylish" (5). In the feminine middlebrow, I seemed to have stumbled upon not only a sub-generic classification for von Arnim's work, but a way of explaining the aesthetic logic underlying that sub-genre.

Of course, it was not to be that easy. My excitement at having discovered a similar aesthetic code between *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and the novels described by Humble was seriously diminished when I noticed the chronological delimitations Humble set for the feminine middlebrow novel: she identifies the genre strictly with the period between the two world wars. If I were to classify *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* with those novels identified by Humble as constitutive of a feminine middlebrow, I faced what seemed, at first, an insuperable barrier of periodization. But perhaps it was not insuperable, after all? Might not the middlebrow, as a middle-class response to modernity, have suffered from the same privileging of rupture that tended to make high modernism seem to emerge fully-formed in and around WWI? If high modernism had effectively buried its own genealogy, was there a chance that the middlebrow's history had been buried as well? Was it possible that the middlebrow had emerged much earlier than Humble had imagined?

Periodicity was not my only concern regarding the utility of Humble's model. Another of my concerns stemmed from the fact that though Humble was claiming to define a sub-genre in her study of the feminine middlebrow, she gave significantly less attention to matters of aesthetic form than she did to matters of content; strangely, she seemed to miss the fact that many of these novels took the form of a diary, Jan Struther's *Mrs. Miniver* and E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* being two relatively familiar examples. If Humble's study of the feminine middlebrow as a genre told us a great deal about women's experiences of modernity, how much more would be revealed by a focused study on a particular sub-genre such as the domestic diary novel?

The longer I considered it, the more convinced I was of the potential benefits of

such a study. The prospect of a genre study that took for its subject a relatively isolated and delimited aspect of feminine middlebrow literary culture suddenly had a great deal to offer, for it seemed to provide not only the opportunity to understand the work of von Arnim but also to tease out the practical, chronological, and geographical scope of middlebrowism. Though recent scholars have complicated our notion of the middlebrow, the strengths of their studies have also been, in some ways, their weaknesses: by focusing on the interwar manifestation of the middlebrow, commentators have missed out on the ways in which the middlebrow emerged and developed in an earlier period. By focusing mainly on American examples of middlebrow culture, they have denied the role of geography and nationalism in the development of the middlebrow; and finally, by focusing on literary culture, they have failed to appreciate the degree to which that literary culture was embedded within a broader cultural expression, manifest in a range of lifestyle factors that included leisure pursuits such as gardening, as well as various consumption practices and modes of cultivating the self. Reading *Elizabeth and her German Garden* alongside *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* uncovers a generic continuity that both complicates received chronologies of middlebrowism and elucidates the ways in which the middlebrow's cultural and ideological investments reflected middle-class women's negotiations of modernity. In order to develop a dialogue between the domestic diary of the interwar period and that of the *fin de siècle*, it is necessary to take a deeper look at the ways in which the domestic diary novel bears out the lived experiences, anxieties, and aspirations of English middle-class women between the wars. Only when the aesthetic code of these interwar domestic diary novels has been deciphered will *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* be recognized for its role in the

development of a feminine middlebrow sub-genre that offered middlebrow readers both a solution to the perceived problems of modernity and an exploration of its possibilities.

Mrs. Miniver, Diary of a Provincial Lady, *and the Interwar Domestic Diary Novel*

Upon its American publication in the summer of 1940, *Mrs. Miniver* was nothing short of a cultural phenomenon. It went through three printings in the first four days of its publication. While magazine and newspaper review columns were filled with praise for "this little book [that] continues to be the header on the bestseller lists everywhere" (*Current History and Forum* November 26 1940)[2], *Mrs. Miniver*'s adoption as Book-of-the-Month Club choice for September of that year confirmed its status as the darling of middlebrow American readers. Reviewers were soon recommending their readers purchase *Mrs. Miniver* if only to "understand why [so many readers] have pounced on it" (Flemington New Jersey *Republican* qtd in Graham 147). *Mrs. Miniver*'s middlebrow franchise was extended with the appearance of a loose film adaptation by Metro Goldwyn Mayer in 1942, which received institutional as well as popular acclaim: seen by nearly 100,000 people within the first four days of its release, *Mrs. Miniver* garnered five Oscars at the year's Academy Awards ceremony.[3] Struther's influence over middle class America extended beyond bestseller lists and the box office; it informed every aspect of cultural life. An entire country found itself infected with *Mrs. Miniver*-itis, the eponymous heroine inspiring commercial spin-offs that included everything from the breeding of Mrs. Miniver roses and the establishment of Mrs. Miniver newspaper

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[2] Struther's biographer, Ysenda Maxtone Graham, confirms that the novel scaled the national bestseller lists, jumping from 21st to 7th position in three weeks (146-7).

[3] The film was honoured with academy awards for best actress, best supporting actress, best screenplay, best directorial achievement, and best achievement in black and white photography.

contests, to the inclusion of Mrs. Miniver meal items on restaurant menus and even the invention of the Mrs. Miniver haircut ("soft," "pretty," and "easy . . . to manage with new Slattery permanent waves," declared one Boston newspaper advertisement).[4]

Nearly ten years before the publication of Struther's *Mrs. Miniver*, readers were similarly enthusiastic about the appearance of a book cast in a similar mode: appearing in 1930, E. M. Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* immediately became a bestseller in both England and America, and was followed up by three sequels: *The Provincial Lady Goes Further* (1932), *The Provincial Lady in America* (1934), and *The Provincial Lady in Wartime* (1939). Like Struther, Delafield's success as a writer lead to her role as a popular lecturer—she followed the American lecture circuit in 1933 on the strength of the Provincial Lady's success. *The Diary* was also chosen as a Book of the Month Club selection (55), Club selection committee member Henry Seidel Canby calling Delafield "one of the really skilful novelists of manners in our day" (62).

The influence in America of *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* on daily life may, paradoxically, be credited to their successful mimesis of it. Both celebrate the "ordinary" details of domestic life, their heroines struggling to balance childcare, shopping, social outings and gardening. The struggle involved with modern housekeeping and family management seems to have been immediately recognizable to many middle-class readers. At least one reviewer commented that Mrs. Miniver "might be almost any woman writing about her husband, her children, and her friends" (*Times Literary Supplement* Oct. 28, 1939 626), while fans of Delafield's "Provincial Lady" found the heroine so life-like they were unwittingly drawn into her household drama. When the Provincial Lady mentions, over the course of the narrative, her son's proclivity

[4] See Maxtone Graham, p. 186

for collecting cigarette-cards, at least one reader actually found herself on the look-out for discarded cards in order to add to the fictional character's collection. "Last night, on a Tube station platform," she wrote, "I found a perfectly clear cigarette-card":

> I appropriated it at once and then stared at it—blank and puzzled; for I have not small friends, importunate in that direction. . . Then, with a queer little stab of disappointment I remembered; I wanted it for the Provincial Lady's schoolboy son, and how could the poor child ever get it?[5]

The popularity of these novels seems due in part to the fact that readers recognized not only the content of Struther and Delafield's novels, but also, to some degree, their form. *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* belong to the sub-genre of the diary novel, an extended piece of fiction that, like its better-known cousin—the epistolary novel—draws on the formal properties of a familiar domestic writing form.[6] Genre studies have paid very little attention to the diary novel. Such neglect, according to Felicity Nussbaum, has been overdetermined by the diary's purpose and mode of composition. Like a memoir or an autobiography, the diary is a "life" written by its subject, though, like a letter, it tended to be meant for private use rather than publication. Furthermore, it is a "life" written spontaneously—in Nussbaum's words, written "to the moment rather than from a retrospective time and stance"—and thus tends to display a formal chaos and a lack of artistic authority which repels its reading as literature (128). Though few scholars have paid extensive attention to historicizing and theorizing the

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[5] The letter was written by Dulcie Gladding to the editor of *Time and Tide* magazine on April 11, 1930.
[6] Lorna Martens offers up the "Dear Diary" convention of journal writing as an example of the close relation between the diary novel and its structural relative, the epistolary novel (56).

diary and its fictional hybrids, those who have provide us with a means of understanding the particular suitability of the diary as a form for middlebrow aesthetics and ideology.

The fact that the diary is a reflexive narrative form recommends it for middlebrow use. In her study of the Book of the Month Club, Janice Radway points out the degree to which the middlebrow elaborated concepts of personalism and idiosyncratic individualism as an antidote to modernity and its attendant anxieties about chaos, standardization, and massification (283). She sees such a mode of thinking at work, for example, in the mind of Henry Seidel Canby, a Book-of-the-Month-Club selection committee member who asserted that the novel needed "to return to [its] age-long privilege of giving to the individual an intenser sense of his [sic] own reality in a society which is always trying to make him a number and a type" (qtd in Radway 293). Significantly, the diary is a form that, like the autobiography, tends to be understood as a "manifestation of the [writer's] concept of self" (Eakin 34). Furthermore, the self-reflexive properties associated with the diary are reinforced by literary historians' citations of its strong historical ties to Christian traditions of spiritual self-examination. In *The Diary Novel*, Lorna Martens sees the diary functioning in a distinct tradition of Protestant dissent: within Puritan, Quaker, Baptist and Methodist movements, the diary was manifested as a "record of conversion, strayings, mercies, token of thankfulness" and constituted "an act of worship" (66). With the advent of the Enlightenment and European romanticism, we see a turn in the diary form from its instrumentalization as a sacred account of experience to an account of the self in terms of a "unique and unrepeatable individuality" strongly associated with affect and emotion. Trevor Field explains:

> In France, as in Britain, the emergence of nineteenth-century Romanticism made emotion a much more obvious part of literature, encouraging the literary interest in diaries by virtue of its overlap with a form that was primarily concerned with the charting of emotion. Dorothy Wordsworth, Scott and Byron all kept important diaries, with Byron's having an immense effect in France; the great *intimiste* Amiel, was explicitly influenced in style and in mood by the reading of Byron's journal. In Germany too, the end of the eighteenth century saw a great flowering of Romantic diaries by Goethe, Herder, Novalis, and others. (31-2)

Clearly the diary had the potential that Canby associated with the traditions of religion and literature to keep alight "the tiny flame of self-realization, self-respect, and self-expression" so threatened by the storm of modernity (qtd in Radway 294).

Furthermore, because of its self-conscious form, Alberto Manguel argues that diary literature has long been identified with narratives of segregated and threatened "people-groups": because such groups tend to be systematically muted, it is only in the "literature they themselves produce", Manguel writes, that they "[read] their own lives" and "find in the confirmation of experience a solid basis upon which to build an authentic image of themselves" (235). It may seem like a stretch to describe the middle classes as a "segregated people-group" in the sense of the political or economic disenfranchisement usually associated with segregation; after all, middle-class America dominated the national economy in terms of the country's earning and spending power, and commanded huge sway in local and national politics. However, as Pierre Bourdieu has persuasively argued, the economy of culture plays a significant role in any social-group's sense of social enfranchisement, its access to social and cultural capital in large measure dictating

its self-perception within a larger societal context. The middle classes, as a social group, were historically "short" on cultural capital. We have only to recall Virginia Woolf's belittling comments about middlebrow culture to realize the degree to which the middle classes were fighting an uphill battle in their struggle to appropriate cultural clout in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, such self-consciousness is evident in the difference "The Provincial Lady" notes between her own diary and the *Life and Letters* of a distinguished society lady recently dead:

> [A]m struck, as so often, by difference between her correspondence and that of less distinguished women. Immense and affectionate letters from celebrities on every other page, epigrammatic notes from literary and political acquaintances, poetic assurances of affection and admiration from husband, and even infant children. Try to imagine [my husband] writing in similar strain in the (improbable) event of my attaining celebrity, but fail. Dear Vicky equally unlikely to commit her feelings (if any) to paper. Robin's letter arrives by second post, and am delighted to have it as ever, but cannot feel that laconic information about boy called Baggs have been swished, and Mr. Gompshaw, visiting master, being kept away by Sore Throat—is on anything like equal footing with lengthy and picturesque epistles received almost daily by subject of biography, whenever absent from home" (31-2).

The Provincial Lady's self-conscious concern about the difference between her life and letters and those of an upper-class socialite in this passage proves unfounded; after all, in purchasing and reading *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, the reader is correcting an historical social imbalance *and* investing in the cultural capital of the middle classes.

Similarly, when Jan Struther declared to lecture audiences across America that "ordinary people, thank goodness, [have] come into their own at last, in the center of the picture" (156), she was articulating what her peers commonly perceived as a hard-won cultural battle. That she counted herself as one of those "ordinary" people was quite clear to her readers: "I am quite an unhighbrow human being," she asserted, "whose main interest is in the day to day feelings of other unhighbrow human beings" (qtd in Graham 191). In declarations such as these, Struther was theorizing a new art of and for the middle classes; in *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, she and Delafield were realizing that vision, offering the middle classes cultural legitimacy by identifying their lives as worthy of artistic representation.

But *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* may be credited with achieving much more than this. After all, one could easily argue that writers had discovered the artistic possibilities of middle-class domestic life in literature long before Struther. Domestic themes are not, after all, exclusive to a middlebrow literary tradition. The domestic figured in highbrow literature of the period, for example: while Gertrude Stein explored a host of household objects and themes in *Tender Buttons: Objects, Foods, Rooms*, Virginia Woolf regularly rendered aspects of middle-class domestic life throughout her oeuvre, from Mrs. Dalloway's flower arrangements to Mrs. Ramsay's signature *boeuf en daube*.[7] If domesticity was a relatively familiar theme in some *avant garde* literature, there does exist a difference between *avant garde* and middlebrow deployments of the domestic. *Avant garde* representations of women's lives explore the domestic register, but rarely present this exploration in a particularly domestic form. In

[7] Humble points out that the *boeuf en daube* of *To the Lighthouse* (1924) is one of the central symbols of "Woolf's most concertedly domestic novel" (140). It stands, Humble maintains, "for the nurturing domestic spirit of Mrs. Ramsay, which the text simultaneously celebrates and relegates to the past" (140).

fact, at times, the *avant garde* deployment of domestic themes appears to be calculated as the choice most likely to throw the high modernist writer's formal innovation into greatest relief. This is not to say that writers like Woolf were uninterested in domestic forms. Woolf was deeply invested in the value of rendering "the texture of the ordinary day" and kept a diary for most of her life (*Diary 2* 298).[8] She even flirted with the idea of the diary's formal possibilities.

> [T]here looms ahead of me the shadow of some kind of form which a diary might attain to. I might in the course of time learn what it is that one can make of this loose, drifting material of life; finding another use for it than the use I put it to, so much more consciously and scrupulously in fiction. (*Diary 1* 266)

Though the diary continued to act as a space for Woolf's reflections on fiction throughout her life, she does not seem to have discovered "[that] form which a diary might attain to". Instead, it was left for middlebrow writers like Struther and Delafield to discover in the diary a likely form through which to serve up their middle-class "slice of life".

The suitability of the diary as a middlebrow form is particularly underwritten by Struther in an episode entitled "The New Engagement Book," in which Mrs. Miniver shops for a new annual engagement book. When the previous year's book runs out of spaces and Mrs. Miniver finally tires of "scribbling untidy notes on the fly-leaf of the old one," she plans a trip to a local stationers' shop to buy a new engagement book. A careful consumer, she examines the store's entire stock. She rejects the model with a day-at-a-glance format as inefficient, for it provides space in excess of what she needs to write her appointments in "bare and laconic" prose (56). She also rejects the two-weeks-at-a-

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[8] Susan Sellers points out that Woolf's first journals date from 1897 and continue until her death in 1941 (109).

glance model for the opposite reason: it provides too little space for her to indulge in descriptions of daily life. "[A] week was what she wanted," Mrs. Miniver reasoned, describing it as "a nice manageable chunk of time with a beginning, a middle, and an end, containing if desired, a space for each of the wonders of the world, the Champions of Christendom, the deadly sins, or the colours of the rainbow" (53-4). Implicit in Mrs. Miniver's whimsical musing about the ideal engagement book is an understanding of the domestic diary as a form, its narrative possibilities (she wants a form with "a beginning, a middle, and an end," for example) as well as its potential to contain her appetite for recording observations of daily life. In writing the "unhighbrow life" of Mrs. Miniver in domestic diary form, Jan Struther had discovered a new middle-class aesthetic; in the words of a reviewer for the St. Petersburg, Florida *Times*, in *Mrs. Miniver* Struther appeared to have discovered "the true art of living, the art of loving, the art of marriage, the art of family life, the art of happiness" (qtd. in Maxtone Graham 148).

It is important to note that the art of living presented by middlebrow domestic diary novels was tied to consumption and thus reflected an engagement with women's role as prime consumers in a modern mass market. As Penny Sparke has noted, consuming became a mode of aesthetic expression in its own right for women within modernity. Such a principle of aesthetic consumption was underwritten by the feminine middlebrow domestic diary novel. Struther explores such a principle in the engagement book incident, for example. As Mrs. Miniver hurries back to the shop to exchange the brown leather book for a green lizard-skin one, she worries to herself,

> [what if the lizard-skin book were] to find its way into the hands of someone who wouldn't appreciate it: some wholly unsuitable person who merely wanted to get

> one in a hurry; a rich, earnest woman who would fill it with committee meetings, or a business man who would not even glance at the binding when he opened it. . . while she herself, with all her dearest activities soberly confined in brown calf, would be thinking about it in an agony of regret. (55)

The above passage offers testimony of the degree to which the domestic diary novel raised domestic consumption to an art form and cast the homemaker in the role of the modern artist. Mrs. Miniver's claim to aesthetic distinction lies not only in her whimsical observations of life's local colour—"Monday was definitely yellow," muses Mrs. Miniver as she examines the engagement books, "Thursday a dull indigo, Friday violet. . . " (54)—but also in her ability to choose commodities best suited to her domestic routine and to appreciate their life-enhancing properties. In modeling the art of consumption, then, the domestic diary novel had the power to interpellate readers as consumers of the products mentioned in its pages: as one reader of Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady* confessed, "The Provincial Lady is even my guide over gramophone records" (L.C. Jubbulpore April 18, 1930 *Time and Tide* 500).

If *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* furnished the middlebrow with an aesthetic, they also provided it with a philosophical impetus. The domestic diary form allowed Struther, Delafield, and others successfully to articulate a middlebrow cultural logic in which the meaning of middle class existence could be signified and interpreted. In his review of the novel for the *New Yorker*, Charles Fadiman asserted that, "though Jan Struther's *Mrs Miniver* is a small book of sketches about very small things, it should not be considered trivial," for in her prose we find "deeply human and humorous perceptions": "Mrs. Miniver. . .will place a gentle hand on your elbow and bid you stop

to observe something quite insignificant, and lo! It is not so insignificant at all" (27 Jul. 1940). It was just such serious philosophical depths, reviewers asserted, that raised the book from entertaining escapism to middlebrow aspirationalism.[9] "[The Minivers] are lightly and entertainingly written [. . .] but [. . .] you can escape with them without feeling that you have wasted your time," asserted Eric Forbes-Boyd of the *Christian Science Monitor* (27 Jan. 1940 11). There was little doubt that the book was wholesome, the reviewer for the *Churchman* promising that, if the "charming little book" is "read leisurely and appreciatively, its serene calm will infuse your whole mind" (Hertell 1 Sep. 1940). Indeed, wholesome aspiration was just the brand of cultural escapism Jan Struther valued, having once likened literary escape to "climb[ing] a mountain-top, . . . rest[ing] the eyes on a wider horizon, . . . breath[ing] for a time a rarer, clearer air, and . . . com[ing] down strengthened and refreshed" (qtd in Graham 100).

Delafield provided readers with a slightly more humorous, though no less wholesome, form of escapist consumption, if the testimony of her fans is any indication: "May E. M. Delafield continue for many weeks to make helpless tears of merriment course down my cheeks," wrote one reader, who claimed that Delafield "has never been more truthful, more scathing, more human than in those Diary entries" ("A Country Reader." *Time and Tide*). A great deal could be written here about the way in which humor has been instrumentalized within a middleclass women's tradition of domestic realism, but it would require a dedicated study. Suffice it to say that humor was a quite

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[9] But just what, besides its tonic value, were the best-selling points of this collection of quotidian episodes in the domestic life of a typical housewife and mother of three? Especially for a segment of readers who ostensibly bought books as a form of escape from just such a quotidian existence? Paradoxically, one reviewer explained, this "masterpiece in miniature" "relieves daily life of its tedium and sting, by making a choice game of it" (*Current History and Forum* 26 Nov. 1940).

common trope in the feminine middlebrow, irony and incongruity working to diffuse stress and anxieties on the home front.[10] As Nicola Humble points out, alongside enjoyable feminine "trivia" of clothes food, family, manners, romance," such books demonstrated "an element of wry self-consciousness," and presented "[the] ability to laugh at [one]self [. . .] as the most endearingly unstuffy of middle-class values" (5; 71). The "Provincial Lady" frequently includes notes and queries to herself in her diary, reflecting just such a quality of wry self-consciousness: in one particularly difficult run-in with her children, she writes, "Query: does Motherhood lead to cynicism? The contrary to every conviction of art, literature, or morality, but cannot altogether escape conviction that answer may be in the affirmative" (234). Humor—particularly in the form of irony—allowed narrators to express concerns about their role in the modern home and family while diffusing any subversion attendant upon its expression.

If the diary form offered its author the opportunity to consolidate the identity of a group, legitimize its aesthetics, and express its concerns, it also served the purpose of preserving a class identity in written form for posterity's sake. Diaries become an important part of historiography in the nineteenth century. Lorna Martens explains that with increasing literacy and leisure time, the personal journal not only entered general practice as a form for writing the individual's personal history, but it entered mainstream publishing as a form of national historiography as well (115). While many contemporaries published their diaries over the nineteenth century—we see publication of diaries of such diverse contemporary personages as actor William Macready (1840s),

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[10] I owe this insight to Maurice L. McMullen, whose monograph on Delafield for the Twayne Author's series is extremely insightful. For McMullen's discussion of Delafield's humour, see pp. 120-123.

cloth merchant Dearman Birchall (1882), and Henry Crabb Robinson (1864), as well as Genevan scholar Henri-Frédéric Amiel's *Fragments d'un journal intime* (1882-84)—the first significant wave of diary publication was justified on the grounds of historical value (Martens 115). The discovery and publication of John Evelyn's diary in 1818 and Samuel Pepys's in 1825 are two important examples of such a trend (Martens 115). This historiographical use of the diary is evident in *Mrs. Miniver*, as the protagonist herself observes at one point: "Words," she reminds herself, "[are] the only sure weapon against oblivion" (24). Mrs. Miniver whimsically considers the debt a middle-class homemaker owes to posterity as she considers the purchase of an engagement book: she hates to purchase a diary late in the year because, in leaving a book blank, she fears she might "risk giving one's biographers—if any—the impression that one has suffered from a prolonged attack of leprosy. Or worse" (52-3). Similarly, the Provincial Lady sends up her claim to history's attention in the following exchange with her husband:

> Robert says, 'Why don't I get into Bed?' I say, Because I am writing in my Diary. Robert replies kindly, but quite definitively, that In his Opinion, That is Waste of Time. I get into bed and am confronted by Query: Can Robert be right? Can only leave reply to Posterity (170).

Of course, the irony is not lost on the reader that, despite the Provincial Lady's concerns about the fate of her life writing, her diary now constitutes the pleasure reading of countless consumers. Far from a waste of time, the Provincial Lady's published diary thus reveals the significance of middle-class women's experience and acts as a literary monument to their daily lives.

As a historical record, the diary form was particularly germane to middlebrow culture, considering its investment in cultural conservation. David Futrelle recounts the speech made by book reviewer and radio host Clifton Fadiman at a 1952 banquet for the founding subscribers to a *Great Book* series put together by Mortimer J. Adler and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*: "Like the monks of early Christendom," Fadiman explained, the Great Books buyers were "taking upon themselves" the burden of preserving "through another darkening [. . .] age the vision, the laughter, the ideas, the deep cries of anguish, the great eurekas of revelation that make up our patent to the title of civilized man" (1). Series like the *Great Books* mediated between the modern mass-marketing of texts and the historical preservation of the book itself, transforming each consumer into a cultural conservationist and a living repository of literary history. No doubt, it was this sense of literature as a cultural and financial investment that prompted at least one reviewer to note that the first edition of *Mrs. Miniver* had become "both rare and valuable" (*Current History and Forum* Nov. 26 1940 52), thus including its readers in a project of once-removed literary preservation.

At this point I should make clear the fundamental difference between the middlebrow cultural preservation project I have been discussing and the very different project vaunted by its *avant garde* contemporaries. Ironically, far from the heroes of cultural preservation, middlebrow readers would have been identified by high modernists as the agents of cultural barbarism, responsible for the very decay of art that necessitated *avant-garde* aesthetic intervention. We find such an intervention in T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922), for example, its web of literary quotations and allusions necessarily constituting cultural "fragments shored against [the] ruins" of an aesthetic tradition which

appeared to be decaying before his eyes. Surprisingly, the blame for such cultural atrophy seems to have been attributed by high modernists not to a growing lowbrow readership, but to an aspiring middlebrow literary machine; "Better mendacities," declares the narrator of Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" "than the classics in paraphrase!" (l.27-8). The *avant garde* project of literary preservation was distinguished from that of the middlebrow through appeals to historical authenticity: thus Eliot's poetry included Greek epigraphs and Italian quotations, while Pound theorized the innovation of an historical method which included "whole slabs of the [historical] record" in original form.[11]

The diary form promoted not only the middlebrow brand of cultural conservation, but a modern middlebrow investment in the conservation of time and energy along the Fordist lines which Radway has elaborated as a characteristic of middlebrow production (261). One distinguishing factor of modernity, as David Harvey has explained in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, is a new attention to industrial process manifested in such modernizing programmes as Fordism and Taylorism. While Frederick Winslow Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) extrapolated principles of industrial energy and efficiency from time and motion studies, breaking down the labor process into easily-managed fragments in order to improve efficiency,[12] Henry Ford took Taylor's

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[11] See Pound's *Guide to Kulchur* (1938) and the invaluable commentary of Michael Coyle in *Ezra Pound, Popular Genres and the Discourse of Culture*. Coyle explains:

> By "history" Pound meant actual historical texts—not just academic commentaries on them, and not just histories but texts of all kinds—the "concrete" evidence of legal codes and poems alike. By "including" he meant neither paraphrase nor allusion, but the transposition of the language of his sources onto his page. He expected that this procedure would ensure historical integrity. (1)

[12] Taylor's experience as a machinist and factory foreman gave him insight into the details of contemporary labor practices and processes, particularly concerning workers' movements and the division of labor.

findings to their logical conclusion, recognizing that industrial proficiency required not only a corresponding consumptive proficiency, but necessitated—in Harvey's words—"a new system of the reproduction of labour power, a new politic of labour control and management, a new aesthetic and psychology, in short, a new kind of rationalized, modernist and populist democratic society" (125-6). Thus Fordism grew from being a system of production or management and became "a total way of life," even influencing aesthetics towards modern "functionality" and "efficiency" (126).

One might argue that the diary, as an aesthetic form, is particularly suited to the time and energy conservation practices we have come to identify with modernity. As previously mentioned, the diary found its roots and at least one mode of expression in a religious tradition in which the diary was instrumentalized in the interests of self-scrutiny and self-discipline. From the eighteenth century on, Methodists, for example, used journals to ensure the regulation of their lives on strict Biblical principles of temperance, charity, and devotion. As the religious journal of self-examination crossed over into secular culture, we witness the diary form being utilized as a method by which to chart and standardize daily living. In this regard, Trevor Howard offers the example of Dr. Johnson, who confessed to taking up journal-writing as a way to "resist sloth and [. . .] methodise my life" (31). Furthermore, Nussbaum points out that the diary had been used to methodize a number of secular practices:

> In the sixteenth century the modern usages of the words diary and journal began to appear. When diary is used in the title of seventeenth and eighteenth century texts, it often refers to medical, astronomical, or meteorological accounts—or, as

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Taylor's time and motion studies, which formed the basis of what came to be known as scientific management, have been seen as distinctly modern studies, insofar as they were dependent upon shifts in conceptions of time from a natural to a standardized and mechanized force. See Harvey, pp.78-80.

> in the case of the popular *Ladies Diary* (1752), it means a kind of almanac or even a housekeeper's pocket book. Such diaries, seldom designed for publication, were instead kept as private record books . . . . The diaries that *were* published in the eighteenth century are not introspective or personal but are most often travel or military—sea diaries or daily accounts of battles. (130-1)

Thus the diary had a long history as an instrument of methodism and process. But how exactly does this history relate to modern domestic practices?

As has been pointed out, the post-Industrial Revolution franchise of such secular methodism was best known in regimes such as Taylorism and Fordism and their associated processes—mechanized production, minute division of labour, standardized products, functional design, and mass consumption—regimes which entered the middlebrow milieu via the domestic sphere. Historians of domestic industry have identified the growing impact of the rational household movement over the first half of the twentieth century. The tenets of Ford and Taylor were manifest in the glut of housekeeping manuals of the period, which promoted the idea of "the labour-saving home," and pushed a "project of rationalising and organizing as well as a new interest in scientific management, health and hygiene" (Sparke 153-6). A report from President Hoover's conference on *Home Building and Home Owning* asserted that "laboratory studies of separate household tasks indicate that the time and motions required can be considerably reduced" (qtd by Sparke 15 . We see in the interwar period the emergence of labour-saving appliances, functional furniture design, and new products—from Dex-O-Tex and Flor-Ever to Tuf-Flex and Formica. Contemporary housekeeping manuals suggested the degree to which textual aids and methodized approaches might help in the

administration of the "modern" household: Russel and Mary Wright's *Guide to Easier Living* (1950), for example, offered appendices ranging from cleaning routine templates to sample division-of-labor charts. This contemporary fascination with the merging of domesticity and Fordism is present in a great deal of interwar feminine middlebrow fiction, including *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady.*[13]

Certainly modern efficiency is significant within *Mrs. Miniver*, the discourse of time and energy rationalization being evoked at several points in the narrative. For example, a Christmas shopping trip offers Mrs. Miniver the occasion to elaborate upon what she calls "[o]ne of the minor arts of life": "the conservation of energy in the matter of swing doors" (35). As sentimentally attached to the old family car as she is—"To part from it, whatever its faults, was to lose a familiar piece of background" (13-14)—Mrs. Miniver is forced to admit, in alignment with modern notions of obsolescence, that her husband Clem might as well buy a new one because "the old Leadbetter had got to the stage when nothing less than an expensive overhaul would do any good" (12).[14]

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[13] Perhaps the most famous example is a book that was extremely popular for readers of all ages, *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1948), by Frank B. Gilbreth Jr. and Ernestine Gilbreth Carey. The book was a comic tribute to the authors' efficiency-pioneer parents, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, who merged psychology and motion study with the concerns of parenting and running a household: "They believed that what would work in the home would work in the factory, and what would work in the factory would work in the home" (37). In typical middlebrow-marketing style, the book's franchise was extended by a sequel-- *Belles on their Toes*—as well as a screen adaptation directed by Walter Lang and featuring Myrna Loy and Clifton Webb (1950). Particularly noteworthy is the peculiarly middlebrow formula for domestic Fordism put forth in the book, which implicitly calls for a balance between efficiency and humanism in passages like the following:

> While we were eating, Dad would keep looking around for something that might be interesting. He was a natural teacher, and believed in utilizing ever minute. . . . But it was Mother who spun the stories that made the things we studied really unforgettable. If Dad saw motion study and team-work in an ant hill, Mother saw a complex civilization governed, perhaps, by a fat old Queen who had a thousand black slaves bring her breakfast in bed mornings. If Dad stopped to explain the construction of a bridge, she would find the workman in his blue jeans, eating his lunch high on the top of the span. It was she who made us feel the breathless height of the structure and the relative puniness of the humans who had built it. (29-30)

15 In fact, Joyce Maxtone Graham herself saw the domestic as an arena in which modern convenience needed to be accommodated by tradition: The *Daily Telegraph*, *the Queen*, and the *Evening Standard* devoted a "Home" page each to the Maxtone-Graham's philosophy of modern home-making: "Ms.

Characteristically middlebrow though, Mrs. Miniver's approach to modernity is one of cautious moderation. She is conscious, for example, of modernity's drawbacks. Though impressed with the modern refinements made to her dentist's adjustable chair, she is nostalgic about the way the old chair acted as a useful counter-irritant to the pain of dentist work: "now, too efficiently suspended between heaven and earth, you were at liberty to concentrate on hell"(195-6). Nevertheless she can appreciate the scope in modern life for a new kind of art, a new kind of poetry that is detectable to the observant. Caught in a traffic jam, she whiles the time away by listening to the repetitive sounds made by the windshield wipers and pondering how one might transcribe the sounds into written words: "It was a dissyllable, something like 'receive' or 'bequeath'" (36) "'Sea-green. . . Sea-green. . .' Perhaps that was nearer the mark?" (38) "Wee Free. . Wee Free. . ' Warmer. She'd get it yet." (38) "that screen-wiper—I *think* what it says is 'Beef Tea'" (40). Thus *Mrs. Miniver* itself becomes a record of efficiency and conservation, an exemplary how-to book for its middlebrow readers that promises to mediate between the tensions of preserving the past and maximizing the present. Furthermore, it confirms the art of modern living as the special province of a middle-class domestic milieu. If Delafield's Provincial Lady is slightly more prosaic than Mrs. Miniver in her description of the modern homefront, she is nonetheless interested in using her diary as a tool for running her household more smoothly. She makes memoranda for herself throughout her diary, jotting down reminders that range from paying the grocer's bills to complaining to

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Maxtone Graham, in the dining room, has chosen a water lily-green table, cellulosed so that hot plates can be put upon it with impunity, and marks wiped off with a damp cloth. The drawing room, entirely planned by Mrs. Maxtone Graham, might be a room in a pleasant country house. The walls are painted Devonshire cream yellow, and cheerful notes are introduced by the red-painted radiators. Built in under one windowsill is the loudspeaker of the radio-gramophone, the control of which is over by the fireplace." (qtd in Maxtone Graham 54)

the cook about the thickness of the bread and butter (2). Furthermore, efficiency characterizes the Provincial Lady's approach to domestic record keeping as well as domestic economy: she regularly eschews punctuation marks and employs various modes of shorthand as if to prevent wasted time or energy in the process of writing her diary.

I have commented upon the degree to which Struther saw the narrative of *Mrs. Miniver* as celebrating the "ordinary person"; however, it is important to note that the novel also celebrates the idea of aspiration and cultivation. The value of personal cultivation was central to a middlebrow cultural mythos. Middlebrow literature provided one important means of exploring and reinforcing it in narrative form. Such literature often depended on the ability of the writer to represent the passage of time needed to accommodate character development. The diary form was ideal for such a purpose, for its fragmented form, punctuated by increments of chronology (often, though not strictly, utilizing dated entries), recommended it for use by writers intending to record and chart progress over time. This application is implicit in such abovementioned proto-diaries as the mariner's log—which recorded geographical progress—as well as the aforementioned Protestant journals of religious self-examination—which told the narrative of personal sanctification. The middlebrow cultivation narrative often took the form of a spiritual confession or *bildungsroman*, chronicling the process by which an individual might scale the mountain top of culture and descend a fully-actualized citizen. Middlebrow escapist literature was thus instrumentalized in a middlebrow Fordism of culture, every ounce of entertainment being put to good use in the reader's aspirational journey. A social and cultural how-to manual, Struther's novel offered middlebrow readers an example of self-cultivation and self-actualization in her heroine: Mrs. Miniver was, one reviewer

asserted, "that ideal lady, always sought and hoped for, but seldom found, who is sprightly yet sensitive, intelligent yet gay, humourous but sympathetic" (*Books* 28 Jul. 1940). Struther's heroine is thus exemplary in her realization of moderation, that all-important principle that essentialised the middle-class impulse to mediate between many extremes: country and city, highbrow and lowbrow, avant-garde and classic, modern and traditional.[15]

Perhaps it is not surprising that reviewers saw reading *Mrs. Miniver* to be an aspirational exercise; the middlebrow had been strongly associated with book and reading culture, especially in the institutionalized form of the book club. The popularity of book clubs with the Provincial Lady's social set is evident throughout her *Diary*, and is the subject of good-natured humour, as evidenced by the common conversation at the dinner parties of her social set:

> Everybody (except Robert) talks about books. We all say (a) that we have read *The Good Companions*, (b) that it is a very *long* book, (c) that it was chosen by the Book of the Month Club in America and must be having immense sales, and (d) that American sales are *what really count*. We then turn to *High Wind in Jamaica*, and say (a) that it is quite a short book, (b) that we hated—or alternatively, adored—it, and (c) that it really *is* exactly *like* children. . . (20)

The Provincial Lady's ironic (if faithful) transcript of the conversation suggests the important role of the book club in defining an entire middle-class community through a

[15] Mrs. Miniver's appeal to all things moderate was salient in the book: upon entering the drawing room and seeing a small bright fire as well as a flood of warm sunshine, she remarked that "it was perfect": "she felt suspended between summer and winter, savouring the best of them both" (5). Such moderation seems to have been prescribed by contemporary women's periodicals, if the experience of Delafield's Provincial Lady is any evidence: she cites an article on gift-giving in the December issue of an unnamed magazine-consumption:, noting the writer's assurance that "I want my gifts. . . to be individual and yet appropriate—beautiful, and yet enduring" (39-40).

particularly middlebrow ideology—or in Radway's words, pedagogy—of reading, a concept I will explore in greater detail in chapter five. It also reminds us of the degree to which consumption and cultural Fordism informed middlebrow culture. It is no coincidence that reading schemes like the Book of the Month Club were a success with many middle-brow readers. As the Provincial Lady's anecdote testifies, the book club offered readers a regulated and Taylorized program of monthly self-cultivation that mass-produced middlebrow readers: nearly all the guests at her neighbour's dinner party had read the same books and produced appropriately-scripted responses to them. In fact, the inevitability of this assembly-line approach to culture at one point inspires the Provincial Lady's wry self-deprecation:

> Nov. 14th: Arrival of Book of the Month choice, and am disappointed. History of a place I am not interested in, by an author I do not like. Put it back into its wrapper again and make fresh choice from recommended list. Find, on reading small literary bulletin enclosed with book, that exactly this course of procedure has been anticipated, and that it is described as being "the mistake of a lifetime." Am much annoyed although not so much at having made (possibly) mistake of a lifetime, as at depressing thought of our all being so much alike that intelligent writers can apparently predict our behavior with perfect accuracy. (8-9)

If Delafield's narrator is conscious of the pressures and anxieties of self-culture for middlebrow readers, she is particularly aware of those for middlebrow women readers whose position on the border between the public and private social sectors significantly complicated their negotiation of aesthetic culture. How, for example, does the modern homemaker reconcile her domestic duties with the obligations of self-cultivation? The

tension between these competing demands is frequently apparent in diary entries like the following:

> Dec. 10th. Robert, this morning, complains of insufficient breakfast. Cannot feel that porridge, scrambled eggs, toast, marmalade, scones, brown bread, and coffee give adequate grounds for this, but admit that porridge is slightly burnt. How impossible ever to encounter burnt porridge without vivid recollections of Jane Eyre at Lowood School, say I parenthetically! This literary allusion not a success. (30)

The uneasy co-existence of the Provincial Lady's domestic duties and her literary self-cultivation is evident here as in other passages of the book; however, Delafield is quick to contrast the relatively moderate middlebrow demands on the homemaker with the rather fascist cerebralism of *avant garde* proponents like the "very, very literary and academic" Miss Pinkerton, who inspires a particularly middlebrow brand of anti-intellectualism. Miss Pinkerton's overly studious conversation is generally one way—"my own part in it," the Provincial Lady admitting, "being mostly confined to saying that I haven't yet read it, and it's down on my library list, but hasn't come, so far"—and furthermore, is also seen to be fundamentally out of touch with the range of middleclass women's occupations and concerns:

> After what feels like some hours of this, Miss P. becomes personal, and says that I strike her as being a woman whose life has never known fulfillment. Have often thought the same things myself, but this does not prevent my feeling entirely furious with Miss. P. for saying so. She either does not perceive, or is indifferent to, my fury, as she goes on to ask whether I realize that I have no *right* to let

myself become a domestic beast of burden, with no interests beyond the nursery and the kitchen. What, for instance, she demands rousingly, have I read within the last two years? To this I reply weakly, that I have read *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, which is the only thing I seem to be able to remember. (245-6)

Delafield's juxtaposition of the intellectual and middlebrow woman in the above exchange is particularly interesting because it gestures to a much larger and ongoing debate about feminism and whether it should be argued for along social-constructivist or biologically-essentialist lines. The exact terms of this debate are not present in the Provincial Lady's dialogue with Miss Pinkerton; however, they are certainly implied, the women's conversation turning on the issue of whether women owe their prime allegiance to the cultivation of family or the cultivation of the self. Delafield's characteristic irony prevents us from declaring absolutely the position of the Provincial Lady in the argument. What is clear, however, is that Delafield seems sympathetic to the plight of the woman who feels she must balance an allegiance to both.

I have discussed the ways in which the aesthetic form and content of *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* register a distinctly middlebrow cultural ideology, celebrating the concepts of cultural conservation and self-cultivation; however, I have not yet taken note, in this regard, of the reinforcing role played by one of their recurring tropes—horticulture. Gardening, Mrs. Miniver comments to her husband as they cull the apple trees behind their country cottage "i[]s so full of metaphors one hardly knows where to begin" (211). Certainly self-cultivation found its quintessential metaphor in horticulture, both processes involving development with the passage of time and fruitful dividends for long-term investment. Mrs. Miniver's preoccupation with arranging

chrysanthemums in a vase in the book's opening chapter suggests the potency of nature as a metaphor and a touchstone for her daily experience:

> She unwrapped the chrysanthemums and arranged them in a square glass jar. . .they were the big, mop-headed kind, burgundy-coloured, with curled petals; their beauty was noble, architectural; and as for their scent, she thought as she buried her nose in the nearest of them, it was a pure distillation of her mood, a quintessence of all that she found gay and intoxicating and astringent about the weather, the circumstances, her own age, and the season of the year. (5)

The discourse of the seasons, furthermore, is manifest in the novel, particularly with regard to Mrs. Miniver's sense of her own self-development: "Mrs. Miniver suddenly understood why she was enjoying the forties so much better than she had the thirties: it was the difference between August and October, between the heaviness of late summer and the sparkle of early autumn, between the ending of an old phase and the beginning of a fresh one" (4). While Mrs. Miniver's encounter with horticulture tends to be rendered in poetic terms, E. M. Delafield's "Provincial Lady" is predictably recounted with irony. Her struggle to cultivate bulbs constitutes much of the novel's drama, as she faithfully chronicles the process of ordering bulbs, purchasing pots, and moving plants around the house according to the diverse advice of well-meaning friends. She is committed, furthermore, to reading gardening manuals, and finally, thanks to a great deal of hard work, the Provincial Lady finds horticultural success. Her commitment to the process of cultivation suggests a broad middlebrow faith in reading as a medium for aspiration that I will explore in following chapters. More significant to me at this point, however, is the fact that the Provincial Lady models her aspiration on the example of a woman whose

name would have been a by-word for literary gardening to contemporary readers—the very woman, in fact, whose literary legacy I am interested in examining in this study: Elizabeth von Arnim. When she discovers a bunch of crocuses blooming beside her doorstep, the Provincial Lady finds herself inclined to "make whimsical and charming reference" to them, "fancy[ing] myself as 'Elizabeth of the German Garden" (87).

In summary, *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* exemplify—in form, content, and reception—a feminine middlebrow literary culture as Humble has theorized it. The sub-genre of the domestic diary novel does indeed seem to bear out Humble's contention that feminine middlebrow novels were aesthetic expressions of middle-class women's social anxiety about the problems and possibilities of modern domesticity. Such interwar generic specialization was not, however, as innovative as Humble's argument would suggest. In fact these domestic diary novels were highly derivative adaptations of a type of narrative whose popularity in England had begun in the 1890s with works such as von Arnim's *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. The continuity of this sub-genre from the turn of the century through the World Wars forces us to reconsider received chronologies of the middlebrow cultural formation that delimit it to the interwar period. In the next chapter I develop a dialogue between domestic diaries of the interwar and *fin-de-siècle* periods that allows us to chart the evolution of a twentieth-century feminine middlebrow culture out of a *fin-de-siècle* anxiety about the "woman question". Furthermore, such a dialogue also promises to refine our sense of the process by which genre encodes social aspiration and to further our understanding of the ways in which middlebrow literature came to be interimplicated with a range of distinctly modern social practices at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Three
The Art of Home and Garden: *Fin-de-Siècle* Feminism, Modernity, and the Domestic Diary Novel.

The middlebrow domestic diary novel appeared at least three decades before *Mrs. Miniver* and *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, with the publication of Elizabeth von Arnim's first novel *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Like its literary descendents, von Arnim's domestic diary novel took readers by storm when it appeared in bookshops on 20 September, 1898. It was reprinted eleven times in the first year, and ran up to twenty-one editions by May 1899 (Howard vii), bringing significant financial success to both its publisher—MacMillan and Company—and its then anonymous author. Reviewers were enchanted with the little green book that chronicled the daily domestic challenges of an English housewife living in Germany.

Certainly *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* displays many of the characteristics and qualities identified by literary historians with the middlebrow. Like Struther's *Mrs. Miniver* and Delafield's *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, the "Elizabeth" book was blatantly marketed in a manner that reflected the middlebrow merging of culture and financial entrepreneurship. Understandably, the franchise of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* could not be extended in precisely the same ways as domestic diaries produced in an age of fully-formed narrative cinema; however, we see an equivalent marketing of spin-offs in the illustrated editions of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* that emerged at the turn of the century, which included photographs of the "German Garden" and several of the novel's central characters.[1] In addition, the book's franchise included several sequels that allowed for the continuing story of "Elizabeth" to be told in separately-purchased

[1] MacMillan and Company reissued its first edition with photographs later in 1898, and in 1906 released an edition with illustrations by S. H. Vedder.

instalments: following *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, MacMillan and Company published *The Solitary Summer* (1899), *The April Baby's Book of Tunes* (1900), and *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen* (1904) in fairly quick succession, to consolidate a devoted readership and to add readers to its numbers. In fact, von Arnim's marketing choices were significant enough to the success of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and similar works of the period that I dedicate chapter five to a discussion of her participation in early patterns of middlebrow cultural marketing.

Just as significant to our understanding of *fin-de-siècle* middlebrow culture, however, is an account of how the domestic diary novel evolved as a hybrid of diverse generic codes and discourses at the turn of the century. Over the next two chapters, I discuss the way in which von Arnim blurred the boundaries between literary and domestic practice, as well as high and low aesthetic discourses, to create a genre capable of capturing middle-class women's responses to the possibilities and perils of modernity in the domestic sphere. In making general reference to "middle-class women," I realise that I am stepping into something of a sociological mine-field: after all, the so-called "middle class" of the period was, in actuality, an impossibly complex social hierarchy stratified and negotiated through myriad social signifiers and any attempt to appreciate its complex internal workings would requiring an extremely nuanced reading indeed. What I am aiming to understand with regard to the feminine middlebrow novel, however, is how a genre seems to have drawn together women from across middle-class social strata through an appeal to a common discourse of home-making. Discourses surrounding homemaking—from discussions about new household technology to the ideology of modern motherhood—seem to have been considered the common ground of women

across a range of middle-class socio-economic positions: while there may have existed slight differences in their responses to the discourse of homemaking, the discourse itself seems to have been accepted as the shared domain of middle-class women in general, especially with the advent of modernity. Take the case of discourses surrounding emerging domestic technology such as the vacuum cleaner, for instance: while middle-class women of some means might have approached it with an eye toward immediate consumption, women of the lower middle-classes would no doubt have adopted a slightly more aspirational approach, and women of a higher middle-class status a manner reflecting their roles as managers of household staff and expenditure. I admit that class is a notoriously difficult subject to treat and the matter of class fluidity must be conceded in any model of class for this period. What I am arguing for in this case, however, is a model of class fluidity that allows not only for social mobility—that is, a change of actual social status—but also for shifting re-alignments of perceived class solidarity according to shifts in context. In the case of gendered domestic discourse about homemaking in the period, my research suggests that women from a range of middle-class positions and orientations were aligned as subjects and consumers. It is with this specific sense of "middle-class" domesticity in mind that I argue below for the feminine middlebrow novel as a reflection and instrument of middle-class women's negotiations of modernity on the homefront.

If Von Arnim's novel brings together the common concerns of women from a range of middle-class social positions, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* also bears the traces of myriad contemporary genres, including the New Woman novel, the diary novel, the gardening manual, the suburban clerkly comedy, and the self-help guide. Such genres

together accommodated and articulated the values and ideologies we have already identified with an interwar feminine middlebrow cultural formation: a concern with modern consumption, especially as it impinged on the domestic economy; a belief in the inherent value of modern conservation, expressed as a project of cultural preservation and celebration of tradition, as well as a dedication to time and motion conservation in the domestic setting; and finally, an interest in cultivating the self and the home in a manner that reflected a modern sense of progress and change. In attempting to account for the genesis and legacy of the domestic diary novel, my examination of Elizabeth von Arnim's *Elizabeth and her German Garden* uses "genrography" as a means by which to explore the history of the middlebrow in its early form. I begin this examination by turning our attention to the ways in which von Arnim, like her successors Struther and Delafield, drew on gendered discourses of domestic anxiety to create a distinctly middlebrow art of modern living.

Fin-De-Siècle Domesticity and *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*

"Such books as the 'German Garden' make life worth living," rhapsodized the *New York Critic* about this "new note in literature" (qtd. in *Country Life* 25 Aug. 1900 251). If it made life worth living, it did so, in part, by investing heavily in the concept of middle class living as inherently worthy of aesthetic representation. Like *Mrs. Miniver*, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* focuses on the ordinary details of middle-class domestic life: the reviewer for *The Athenaeum* mused, for example, at the ability of "[t]he fascinating Elizabeth" to "talk about everything and nothing" (19 Nov. 1898). Like Caroline Miniver, Elizabeth is an Englishwoman preoccupied with making a home for herself, her husband (playfully dubbed the "Man of Wrath"), and her children (three

daughters nicknamed the April, May, and June babies). As she negotiates the stresses of entertaining housebound children on an unseasonably cold spring day, bears up under the invasion of unwelcome houseguests, and negotiates the household budget with a sometimes cantankerous husband, "Elizabeth" was a middle-class domestic heroine with whom many readers could relate.

At times the narrative reads like a *fin-de-siècle* "For Better or For Worse," satirizing the overwhelming demands of domestic life.[2] The nurturing of children appears to be a constant stress. As she watches her children entertain themselves by stuffing pieces of newspaper up each other's ears, Elizabeth resignedly foresees the necessity of torture by tweezers to rectify matters (125). Her patience is further tried by the "parsonic probings" of the precociously pious April baby, whose religious interests appear to range from Noah's Ark to the apparel of angels:

> "What do they wear for clothes?" [the April baby] asked in German-English.
>
> "Why, you've seen them in pictures," I answered, "in beautiful, long dresses, and with big, white wings."
>
> "Feathers?" she asked.
>
> "I suppose so,--and long dresses, all white and beautiful."
>
> "Are they girlies?"

---

[2] Lynn Johnston's successful comic strip "For Better or for Worse" has been sending up the daily life of the fictitious Patterson family since 1979. It seems significant that the strip's success has been linked, at least in part, to Johnston's strict adherence to chronological realism: according to one reviewer, "The world has watched the Patterson family grow up in real time, and to many readers, the Pattersons feel like family!" (1). Like the interwar domestic diary novels discussed in the previous chapter, the comic strip seems to depend on time as an important factor in the development of an empathetic rapport between readers and characters. It is also significant to note that the comic strip would have arrived in readers' homes with the regularity of newspapers and, as such, its effect may be closely linked to the domestic diary entries of Mrs. Miniver and the Provincial Lady, which were initially published as regular newspaper and magazine columns respectively. The first glimpse of Mrs. Miniver appeared in the *Times* on Wednesday, October 6, 1937, while the Provincial Lady made her first appearance in the pages of *Time and Tide* on December 6th, 1929.

"Girls? Ye-es."

"Don't boys go into the *Himmel*?"

"Yes, of course, if they're good."

"And then what do *they* wear?"

"Why, the same as all the other angels, I suppose."

"*Dwesses*?"

She began to laugh, looking at me sideways as though she suspected me making jokes. "What a funny Mummy!" she said, evidently much amused. She has a fat little laugh that is very infectious. . .

"Mummy," she said presently.

"Well?"

"Where do the angels get their dresses?"

I hesitated. "From *lieber Gott*," I said.

"Are there shops in the *Himmel*?"

"Shops? No."

"But, then, where does *lieber Gott* buy their dwesses?" (61-2)

The April baby's religious naïveté may serve the purpose of comic relief in the novel, but the narrator's account serves another purpose as well. It confirms what my previous discussion of *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady* has already suggested, that a concern with consumption was becoming significantly naturalised within contemporary middle-class logic, informing even the most basic domestic transactions of children's religious tuition.

Hospitality joins childcare in the long list of Elizabeth's domestic duties, and receives generously ironic treatment, Elizabeth being constantly beleaguered by unwanted houseguests who seem to arrive at the worst times:

> I have two visitors staying with me, though I have done nothing to provoke such an infliction, and had been looking forward to a happy little Christmas alone with the Man of Wrath and the babies. Fate decreed otherwise. Quite regularly, if I look forward to anything, Fate steps in and decrees otherwise; I don't know why it should, but it does. I had not even invited these good ladies—like greatness on the modest, they were thrust upon me. (101)

Such a passage suggests the degree to which *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, like *Mrs. Miniver* and *The Diary of a Provincial Lady*, relies on "wry self-consciousness" in its portrayal of the anxieties at the heart of the modern homemaker's daily life (Humble 5). Comedy is used here to defuse von Arnim's potentially subversive critique of women's daily domestic demands. Elizabeth's reference to houseguests as an unprovoked "infliction" is no doubt intended to strike the reader as humorously incongruous, but it also constitutes one homemaker's refusal to participate in the fiction of entertaining as an art of effortless and gracious homemaking.

It has been argued by Nicola Humble that the intense domestic focus of interwar middlebrow novels can be read as an attempt by middle-class women to come to terms with anxiety about their new responsibilities for labour in the home (5). Indeed, Humble is correct that the interwar years were a time when major shifts were taking place within the domestic economy, the homemaker increasingly responsible for the tasks of cleaning, cooking, and purchasing as a result of reduced wartime incomes and labor supply. It is

important to note, however, that the home had been a site of increasing anxiety for women for some time before World War I. In fact, according to Penny Sparke, homemaking had been a site of significant flux and change from the middle of the nineteenth century, when "the dominant themes of domesticity were changed and the expectations of the housewife transformed by the impact of modernity" (77). The rational household movement was already influencing homemakers by the late nineteenth-century, the movement growing out of modern concerns about efficiency in various labour settings. Sparke traces this movement through shifts in homemaking manuals published during the second half of the nineteenth century:

> When Catherine Beecher introduced the idea [of domestic economy] in her *Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* of 1841 it was intended as a means of enhancing the cultural significance of the home and of feminine domesticity in the fullest sense. For Beecher the home had a fundamentally spiritual purpose and the injection of reason and order into the household was meant to enhance, not to counter that role. By 1869 when she republished the book, the climate had already changed and a more progressive tone was present in the enhanced use of new technologies, among them an enclosed stove and the latest forms of heating and plumbing. . . . In Britain Mrs. Beeton's *Book of Household Management* appeared in 1861. . . [and] also adopted a rational approach towards household tasks and activities. (80)

Beeton's massive instructive manual opens with an image of the modern homemaker, acting not in the role of a spiritually-inflected angel of the house, but as "the leader of an enterprise" or a "commander of an army" (1). By the end of the century, the English

housewife found herself increasingly implicated in a discourse of modern professionalism[3]. Manuals such as *Home Management* lamented the discomfort and waste of time caused by "lack of method" and exhorted the young, inexperienced home manager to write out "[a] working time-table for the home" in order to ensure that she is "orderly and methodical in her work" (qtd. in Gardiner 93, 96). Thus by the turn of the century, the English homemaker had become both household economist and domestic warrior, doing battle with wasted time, space, and energy, among other new domestic enemies.[4]

If the rational household movement gave homemakers a new professional identity, it was one attended by anxiety. The campaign for domestic efficiency, professionalism, and skill was often waged at the cost of more traditional homemaking priorities such as taste, whimsy, and beauty, values which had informed the domestic ideal in the first half of the nineteenth century (Sparke 87). As Sparke writes,

> [r]ationality meant efficiency, professionalism and skill, all of which mitigated against an emphasis upon the aesthetic component of home-making, which had emphasized the roles of intuition, instinct, and amateurism. This is not to say, of

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[3] A strong influence on the development of the home-maker as a professional identity was the home economics movement. Led by chemist Ellen Richards, the American Home Economics Association was founded in the 1890s, with the purpose of training young women to cope with the complexity of the modern home and family. Though it originated in America, home economics influenced housekeeping on both sides of the Atlantic. For more details on the home economics movement, see John L. Rury's entry for 'Home Economics' in the *Handbook of American Women's History*, pp. 250-1.

[4] She was also waging war against the new domestic enemies identified by modern science. Proponents of the rational household movement such as early twentieth-century writer and activist Charlotte Perkins Gilman described the myriad ways in which "civilized life is open to danger" in the household: "Sewer gas invades the home[, and] microbes, destructive insects, all diseases invade it also"(qtd. in Sparke 83). But modernity had supplied the homemaker with new weapons with which to combat the enemy. Myriad labour and space-saving technologies emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century, helping to create the modern domestic scene. First appearing in 1876, the carpet sweeper had replaced the broom almost completely by 1890. By 1901, we witness the invention of the domestic suction—or "vacuum"—cleaner, while the Hoover—the first vacuum cleaner to use both a cloth filter bag and cleaning attachments—was first patented and sold in 1908.

> course, that women did not carry on exercising their taste in their homes and continue to enjoy arranging flowers, polishing furniture, fluffing up cushions and arranging knick-knacks on surfaces. What it did mean, however, is that none of this was any longer openly encouraged and, more importantly, no longer openly valued by society at large. (87)

The rational household movement left an indelible mark on the modern household; however, it is important to note that its influence, far from being inevitable, was contested within the domestic space. It is this competition between an old order of housekeeping and a new one that informs the middlebrow domestic diary novel at the *fin de siècle*.

Certainly *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* bears out this tension, pointing to the contemporary homemaker's ambivalence towards time, energy, and space conservation. For instance, Elizabeth is well aware of the importance of financial economy, yet chafes against the aesthetic limitations such economic constrictions necessitate: faced with accumulating bills one cold January morning, she observes that "[g]ardening. . is expensive when it has to be paid out of one's own private pin money" (154). Yet she appreciates the fact that attention to time and space efficiency can maximize many beneficial aspects of home life. She explains, for example, how multitasking and space management enhance her aesthetic experience of daily life: "I love [the] west windows better than any others, and have chosen my bedroom on that side of the house so that even times of hair-brushing may not be entirely lost" (6). Charged with the task of refitting an old nunnery as a family home, Elizabeth opts for whimsical

flowered wallpaper and that staple of hygienic household aesthetics, "clean white paint".[5] She is pleased with the effect:

> How pretty the bedrooms looked with nothing in them but their cheerful new papers! Sometimes I would go into those that were finished and build all sorts of castles in the air about their future and their past. Would the nuns who had lived in them know their little whitewashed cells again, all gay with delicate flower papers and clean white paint? And how astonished they would be to see cell No. 14 turned into a bathroom, with a bath big enough to ensure a cleanliness of body equal to their purity of soul! (13-4)

The narrator is not always so convinced of the merits of domestic rationalism. Note her ambivalence, for example, toward the space-saving furniture her neighbor has purchased as a Christmas gift for her husband:

> [It is] a beautiful invention, as she explained, combining a bedstead, a sofa, and a chest of drawers, and into which you put your clothes and on top of which you put yourself, and if anybody calls in the middle of the night and you happen to be using the drawing room as a bedroom, you just pop the bedclothes inside, and there you are discovered sitting on your sofa and looking for all the world as though you had been expecting visitors for hours. (95)

Elizabeth's musings on the wonders of modern engineering here are echoed throughout the book. Even Elizabeth's four-year old daughter recognizes the planned obsolescence of modern commodities. On her way to bed on Christmas night, the April baby points her new doll's attention to the Christmas tree, explaining, "'*You'll* never see such trees again

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[5] See *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, p.16. According to Sparke, the colour white took on "a special significance" in the period "as the ultimate symbol of cleanliness" (79).

. . . for you'll be brokened *long* before next time'" (118). Such episodes provide readers with comic relief, but point, too, to a nostalgia for a less artificial, more natural approach to domesticity. Elizabeth often embraces a mode of living that owes more to aesthetic than to rational concerns. When lilacs are in season, for example, she brings armfuls into the house, filling "every pot and bowl and tub in the house [with] . . . purple glory," and inspiring the servants "[to] wonder why the house should be filled with flowers for one woman by herself" (42-3). Thus the art of modern living that Elizabeth cultivates over the course of the narrative points to a need to balance a discourse of modern time and resource conservation with one focused on aesthetic and affective concerns.

Elizabeth's narrative registers the tension of competing domestic discourses, a fact which may account, to some degree, for what many reviewers saw as the narrator's split personality, her first-person narrative seeming to alternate between modes of practicality and whimsy. Reading *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, the *Northamptonshire Daily Reporter* asserted, "One imbibes lessons of sweetest philosophy *and* practical good sense" (Nov. 19, 1898 emphasis mine). Elizabeth offers practical tips on how to plant flowers to maximum effect, for example, though domestic activity is just as apt to prompt her thoughtful meditation on issues such as the middle-class soul. When receiving callers, for instance, she often falls to wondering "at the vast and impassable distance that separates one's own soul from the soul of the person sitting in the next chair" (48). Elizabeth muses that "the worst of being fed enough and clothed enough and warmed enough and of having everything you can reasonably desire" is that "on the least provocation you are made uncomfortable and unhappy by such abstract discomforts as being shut out from a nearer approach to your neighbour's soul" (50). Such a ponderous

thought is leavened, however, by her quip that "[in all] probability [. . .] he hasn't got one" (50). In her philosophical as well as domestic insights, irony works to allay the tension of middle-class domestic anxiety, as Elizabeth attempts to balance a traditional discourse of housekeeping and homemaking with a new, modern discourse, setting the precedent for interwar middlebrow domestic diary novels such as *Mrs. Miniver*.

Perhaps Nicola Humble may be excused for missing the continuity between domestic anxiety in interwar and *fin-de-siècle* domestic diary novels; after all, such anxiety has often been buried along with other aspects of women's history in the home. Another distinct late nineteenth-century species of domestic anxiety is salient in *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, an anxiety concerned less with how the ideal home should be run, than with which gender should ideally be responsible for running it.

Any discussion of *fin-de-siècle* domestic anxiety, particularly with regard to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, must take into consideration the overwhelming contemporary concern with the "Woman Question". In fact, one reason why so little attention has been paid to women's anxieties about transformations in the modern home is because such concerns have tended to be eclipsed by the insistent debate over the New Woman, that controversial and sometimes contradictory emblem of women's emancipation in the modern era.[6] It is not my intention exhaustively to rehearse the history of the New Woman and its related debates, for there exists a burgeoning scholarship dedicated to its exposition.[7] Suffice it to say that social, political, and cultural

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[6] The term "New Woman" first appeared in an article, "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," written by Sarah Grand for *The North American Review* in 1894.

[7] For example, see Ann Ardis's *New Woman, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990), Lyn Pykett's *'Improper Feminine': the Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), Susan Hamilton's (ed) *'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Nineteenth-Century Writings by Women on Women* (1995), and Ann Heilmann's *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-Wave Feminism* (2000).

transformations in the second half of the nineteenth century broadened the scope of bourgeois women's lives and seriously challenged the gendered model of separate spheres that had traditionally structured bourgeois experience. While trains, bicycles, and later, motorcars, offered middle-class women an unprecedented mobility outside the home, legislative and educational developments challenged the assumptions that women belonged there in the first place.[8] A lively debate arose around women's role in modern society, particularly with regard to the issue of women's work. At the heart of the debate—at least within most middle-class contexts in Britain—was the problem of whether the bourgeois woman's traditional career options—marriage, maternity, help-meeting, and housekeeping—were biologically determined or socially constructed. While one sector of feminist reform worked to present the category of "woman" as a social construct, and agitated for the abolition of the gendered spheres of labour and gender-based privilege,[9] other sectors represented motherhood, marriage, and domestic labour as biological imperatives for women, who would thus naturally gravitate to labour in the home.[10] The New Woman stood at the centre of this debate. A ubiquitous

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[8] Furthermore, the passage of legislation such as the *Married Women's Property Acts* (1870; 1882) and the repeal of the *Contagious Diseases Act* (1886) were slowly establishing women's civil rights within marriage, the home, and society. Secondary and post-secondary educational institutions were opening their doors to women, implicitly challenging the traditional professions of wife and mother that were open to middle-class women.

[9] As Talia Schaffer points out, women's desire for non-gender-normative employment "coincided with new possibilities at the *fin de siècle*: secretaries could use new technologies like typewriters or telephones, clerks were needed in the new department stories, expanding co-education meant women could teach more types of subjects, and after Florence Nightingale's reforms, the new respectability of nursing encouraged many middle-class young women to do philanthropic nursing work in urban centers" (1). Schaffer notes that women's incursion into a sphere of labour hitherto gendered male was the topic of several New Woman novelists: while Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898), and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899) each describe the difficulties of professional writing as a career for women, Mona Caird's *The Daughters of Danaeus* (1894) Mary Ward's *Marcella* (1894) and Lucas Malet's *The Wages of Sin* (1890) take up women's pursuit of musical composition, nursing, and art respectively ("New Woman novelists, 1880-1910" 1-2) .

[10] Though they did not all advocate a traditional family framework, Iota, Menie Muriel Dowie, and George Egerton all wrote about women's innate suitability for motherhood. In *Yellow Aster* (1894), for example,

rhetorical fabrication of the *fin de siècle*, the New Woman was drawn and redrawn within the literature of the period in order to vilify or valorize the emancipated woman, depending on the author's political orientation. She was a figure of anxiety, figuring the tensions not only between feminists and their opponents, but within the feminist camp itself, which could not reach a consensus about issues such as maternity, the nature of woman, marriage, and domestic work, let alone agree upon the nature of needed reforms and the strategies by which they should be achieved. These tensions are present in New Woman fiction, a genre of literature that frequently coalesced around an emancipated female protagonist.[11] As Carolyn Christensen Nelson points out in *British Women Fiction Writers of the 1890s*, such fiction not only revealed the struggle for women's emancipation, but actually intervened in it, in a manner equivalent to the more specific, political initiatives of suffragettism a decade later (1). Many writers with a feminist agenda challenged generic conventions, noting that the limited contemporary narrative possibilities for female characters were re-enactments of the stringent limits placed on women by social convention (Miller 5). Jane Eldridge Miller asserts in her book *Rebel Women*, for instance, that New Woman writers often restructured the novel to reflect a growing view that marriage might constitute an opening crisis in a couple's life as much as a happy ending. Furthermore, many women writers of the 1890s utilized new techniques like stream of consciousness, ellipsis, and shifting points of view to explore what they considered to be unprecedented subject matter (5). New Woman narratives

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Iota's heroine Gwen Waring declares, upon giving birth, "I am a woman at last, a full complete proper woman" (177).

[11] Writers often designated as New Woman writers include Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, Olive Schreiner, Ouida (Louise de la Ramée), Iota (Kathleen Mannington Caffyn), George Egerton, Ella Hepworth Dixon, George Paston (Emily Morse Symond), Emma Frances Brooke, and Menie Muriel Dowie, although Grant Allen and Thomas Hardy are often included in this list. According to Ann Ardis, more than a hundred novels were written about the New Woman between 1883 and 1900 (4).

were often set outside the domestic sphere, reflecting many feminists' refusal "to be relegated to a separate sphere from men" and to be shut out from "the opportunities and freedoms her brother had" (8).

In some ways it is surprising that historians of New Woman literature have failed to recognize *Elizabeth and her German Garden*[12] as an engagement with the *fin-de-siècle* "Woman Question," for the feminist tensions surrounding modern domesticity are salient in its pages. Von Arnim's decision to present the narrative from a first-person female perspective suggests her interest in exploring women's consciousness and agency, concepts that were, according to one contemporary social commentator in 1897, modern discoveries of the *fin de siècle*, "unknown to our mothers and grandmothers" (qtd. in Gardiner 2). Elizabeth's narrative might also be read as sympathetic to contemporary feminism with regard to her treatment of marriage. Jane Eldridge Miller points out in *Rebel Women* that a novelist's choice to represent women's post-marriage life rather than courtship experience constituted a radical shift from convention and tended to be characteristic of New Woman fiction. Elizabeth confides to the reader that she does not plan to seek husbands for her daughters: "I can imagine nothing more uncomfortable than a son-in-law," she writes, "and besides, I don't think a husband is at all a good thing for a girl to have" (157). No doubt many contemporary feminists shared Elizabeth's frustration, too, with the hypocritical social code that encouraged women's labour in the private sphere, but prohibited her from gardening in public, even in her own garden:

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[12] Jane Eldridge Miller does dedicate a very brief section of her book to discussion of Elizabeth von Arnim's work, but she focuses entirely on one of the author's later books, *The Pastor's Wife* (1914). Such a move is understandable, as *Elizabeth and her German Garden* was published in 1898, too early to fit into the Edwardian parameters Miller sets for her study.

> I wish with all my heart I were a man, for of course the first thing I should do would be to buy a spade and go and garden, and then I should have the delight of doing everything for my flowers with my own hands and need not waste time explaining what I want done to somebody else. It is dull work giving orders and trying to describe the bright visions of one's brain to a person who has no visions and no brain, and who thinks a yellow bed should be calceolarias edged with blue. (98)

Elizabeth's narrative may also be seen to be aligned with a constructivist sector of first-wave feminism in the sense that she frequently complains of women's domestic entanglements and hankers after solitude and self-determination. Such complaints and desires were certainly deemed to be at odds with contemporary ideals of motherhood and homemaking.[13] Contemporary housekeeping guides such as *Home Management* make it clear, for example, that "no other walk of life" required such "unselfishness" and there was no woman "more self-denying" and "more heroic" than "[a] good mother" (qtd in Gardiner 94). Having been sent ahead by her husband to prepare the new family home, Elizabeth begins to find it difficult to follow a script of self-denial. She glories in her freedom from the grind of daily domesticity and loses track of time in the pleasure of her new garden, until, that is, the arrival of her husband to check up on her progress:

> Then he appeared suddenly who has a right to appear when and how he will and rebuked me for never having written, and when I told him that I had been literally

[13] Such frustration with contemporary expectations of women was expressed in a number of New Woman novels, including Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins* (1893), in which the two female protagonists, Evadne and Edith, sacrifice themselves in nihilist marriages. Grand's narrative implied a harsh criticism of the cultural ideal of female self-sacrifice and revealed it to be both outmoded and unfair to women.

> too happy to think of writing he seemed to take it as a reflection on himself that I could be happy alone. I took him round the garden along the new paths I had made, and showed him the acacia and lilac glories, and he said that it was the purest selfishness to enjoy myself when neither he nor the offspring were with me. . . [N]othing appeased that Man of Wrath, and he said he would go straight back to the neglected family. (15)

Elizabeth dutifully returns to the schedule of daily domestic life, but she continues to resist the domestic ideal to which contemporary homemakers were constantly compared. She describes her neighbour, for example, as "[the] pattern of what a . . .lady should be': she "is not only a pretty woman but an energetic and practical one, and the combination is, to say the least, effective. She is up at daylight. . . [A] thousand things get done while most people are fast asleep, and before lazy folks are well at breakfast she is off. . .to poke into every corner. . ." (45); even her children are "patterns of health and neatness" (47). Though she admits that such domestic dedication seems to suit her neighbour, Elizabeth claims the right to determine her own course, based on her unique gifts and skills, rather than on the basis of women's universal calling: "I don't think I shall ever try to follow in her steps, my talents not being of the energetic and organising variety, but rather of that order which makes their owner almost lamentably prone to take up a volume of poetry and wander out to where the kingcups grow, and, sitting on a willow trunk beside a little stream, forget the very existence of everything but green pastures and still waters and the glad blowing of the wind across the joyous fields" (47).

It becomes clear over the course of the narrative that her talents particularly suit her for a literary life. The difficulty of balancing literary work with child-rearing and

housekeeping becomes quite clear, however, a difficulty commonly explored in New Woman fiction. Author of such New Woman novels as *The Heavenly Twins* (1893) and *The Beth Book* (1897), Sarah Grand explains the challenge facing women writers in an article entitled "Should Married Women Follow Professions?" (1899): "I tried for many years to combine housekeeping and literary pursuits, and managed both, but at infinite cost. My health, household, and literary work all suffered; and it was not until circumstances put it in my power to give myself up entirely to literature that I succeeded" (258). Over the course of Elizabeth's narrative it becomes quite clear that she faces a similar challenge. In her diary entry for May 14th, for example, Elizabeth sits down to write, only to find herself hindered by "the three babies, more persistent than mosquitoes, raging round [her]" and plunging "several of [their] thirty fingers . . . in the inkpot" (22). Elizabeth's status as a woman writer does align her, in some ways, with the New Woman *kunstleroman* tradition, in which the narrative follows the tragic trajectory of female writers' careers in a patriarchal context or, less frequently, celebrates the success of the female artist who has freed herself from social constrictions.[14] It is difficult to place *Elizabeth and her German Garden* precisely within the New Woman *kunstleroman* tradition, however, in great part because Elizabeth's literary aspirations tend to be incidental to the storyline. Obviously she has met with success as an author because, after all, we are reading her published narrative; however, the narrative appears to take women's literary success for granted, the narrative focusing instead on one woman's struggle to cultivate her home and garden in a manner that is meaningful within her own personal economy of logic. In fact, the narrative's tendency to elevate the fate of the

[14] As mentioned in note 9, the difficulties of the professional woman writer was taken up by works including Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* (1894), George Paston's *A Writer of Books* (1898), and Mary Cholmondeley's *Red Pottage* (1899).

individual personality above that of women as a group may be at least one reason why *Elizabeth and her German Garden* has been neglected in studies of New Woman literature; it is not, however, the only explanation.

Another reason for the neglect of Von Arnim's novel by New Woman scholars may be that its narrative is highly ironic, a characteristic not generally associated with the New Woman novel which, in contrast, tended to be branded by reviewers as blatant propaganda. For example, Sarah Grand's *Beth Book* was dismissed by a reviewer for the *Spectator* because it turned "a prodigiously elaborate study of temperament" into "an impassioned and polemical pamphlet on the marriage question" (qtd. in Nelson 5). In contrast, von Arnim avoids open polemic in her novel. On the rare occasion that she does openly protest gender inequality, it is presented at a remove from the speaker, her criticism always buffered by humour, class bias, or cultural alterity. She loudly laments the treatment of Russian women labourers, for example, who, she explains, "get less [than male labourers], not because they work less, but because they are women and must not be encouraged" (75). Compounding such injustice, she elaborates, the women labourers also "have to produce offspring, quite regardless of times and seasons and the general fitness of things; they have to do this as expeditiously as possible, so that they may not unduly interrupt the work in hand; nobody helps them, notices them, or cares about them, least of all the husband" (79). Though the labour issues Elizabeth addresses—issues such as equal pay and maternity leave—are significant aspects of the feminist platform, her social critique is weakened by a tendency to quarantine her criticism to ethnic and class groups not her own.

Von Arnim's representation of contemporary feminism is further problematised by the ambivalent representation of the New Woman within the narrative. Von Arnim introduces a New Woman to the narrative in the form of Minora, a young English woman who arrives at Nassenheide to stay with Elizabeth for the Christmas holidays. Minora enters the narrative on that new-fangled machine of the *fin de siècle*, the bicycle (106-7). A characteristic New Woman, she speaks loudly and aggressively, employs all the latest slang, and evangelically promotes the newest dance step—"the Washington Post"—despite the fact that her hosts "remained untouched by its beauties" (133). She is attending art school, but her belief in women's right to practice any profession—so fundamental to feminists of a constructivist persuasion—has resulted in an amateurish dilettantism, an association which her name, Minora, may reinforce. Not satisfied with studying art, Minora also dabbles in journalism and has literary pretensions as well. It is not long before the reader recognizes Minora as a figure of Elizabeth's mockery, as the following passage suggests:

> "What a quaint room," [Minora] remarked, looking round, "and the hall is so curious too. Very old, isn't it? There's a lot of copy here."
>
> The Man of Wrath, who had been in the hall on her arrival and come in with us, began to look about on the carpet. "Copy?" he inquired, "Where's copy?"
>
> "Oh—material, you know, for a book. I'm just jotting down what strikes me in your country, and when I have time shall throw it into book form." She spoke very loud [sic], as English people always do to foreigners.

The general effect of Minora's behaviour results in the alignment of the narrator—and very soon the reader as well—against the gauche and insufferable New Woman.

> "My dear," I said breathlessly to Irais, when I had got into her room and shut the door and Minora was safely in hers, "what do you think—she writes books!"
>
> "What—the bicycling girl?"
>
> "Yes—Minora—imagine it!"
>
> We stood and looked at each other with awe-struck faces.
>
> "How dreadful!" murmured Irais. "I never met a young girl who did that before."
>
> "She says this place is full of copy."
>
> "Full of what?"
>
> "That's what you make books with."
>
> "Oh, my dear, this is worse than I expected! A strange girl is always a bore among good friends, but one can generally manage her. But a girl who writes books—why it isn't respectable! And you can't snub that sort of people; they're unsnubbable."
>
> "Oh, but we'll try," I cried, with such heartiness that we both laughed.
>
> (109-110)

More damning than her dilettantism, however, is Minora's lack of humour. As Humble points out with regard to the interwar feminine middlebrow tradition, "the biggest social sin, in the middlebrow imagination, is that of taking oneself too seriously" (Humble 48).

It was equally sinful a few decades earlier. Elizabeth and guest Irais gently mock Minora as she describes the details of her artistic process:

> "Anything that strikes me as curious or amusing—I jot it down, and when I have time shall work it up into something, I daresay." . . .
>
> "What shall you call it?"
>
> "Oh, I thought of calling it *Journeyings in Germany*. It sounds well, and would be correct. Or *Jottings from German Journeyings*,--I haven't quite decided yet which."
>
> "By the author of *Prowls in Pomerania*, you might add," suggested Irais.
>
> "And *Drivel from Dresden*," said I.
>
> "And *Bosh from Berlin*," added Irais.
>
> Minora stared.
>
> "I don't think those two last ones would do," she said, "because it is not to be a facetious book. But your first one is rather a good title," she added, looking at Irais and drawing out her notebook. "I think I'll just jot that down."
>
> "If you jot down all we say and then publish it, will it still be your book?" asked Irais.
>
> But Minora was so busy scribbling that she did not hear. (111-2)

The exchange between the naïve New Woman Minora and her ironic and sophisticated hostess is valuable for its comedic value alone, but is also significant within the economy of the narrative because it allows von Arnim to demonstrate her own knowing superiority to both of her fictional creations. Irais's closing question highlights a ubiquitous criticism of New Woman writing, that it tends to be unimaginative, merely copied from "real life"

and therefore barred from holding the status of real literature. Of course this criticism of Minora's "copy" is ironic considering the fact that Elizabeth herself is writing a work for publication in a form—the diary—that is similarly open to indictment as artless "copy" of life. However, it is just such ironic self-consciousness that appears, in Elizabeth's mind, to elevate "copy" to art, and it is certainly a modern quality which Minora, despite her fervent championing of modernity, seems to be lacking.

Minora is useful within the economy of the narrative as a figure of feminist extremism that allows von Arnim to construct a distinctly moderate brand of feminism in contrast. In a conversation near the end of the book, Elizabeth, the Man of Wrath, Minora, and Irais debate aspects of the contemporary "Woman Question". The conversation rehearses some of the most popular contemporary arguments for and against women's emancipation, the participants forming a gamut of social responses to the debate with Minora standing as strident feminist, the Man of Wrath as advocate of male chauvinism, and Elizabeth and Irais falling somewhere between these two poles. The Man of Wrath begins the conversation with a divide-and-conquer rhetorical strategy:

> "I like to hear you talk together about the position of women," he went on, "and wonder when you will realise that they hold exactly the position they are fitted for. As soon as they are fit to occupy better, no power on earth will be able to keep them out of it. Meanwhile, let me warn you that, as things are now, only strong-minded women wish to see you the equals of men, and the strong-minded are invariably plain. The pretty ones would rather see men their slaves than their equals". (143)

The Man of Wrath reminds his listeners that women's position under German law is still one of disenfranchisement, for they are classed with "children and idiots" as incapable of handling the responsibility of civil rights.[15] He playfully defends the position, asking, "what is there, candidly, to distinguish you from children? You are older, but not wiser--really not so wise, for with years you lose the common sense you had as children. Have you ever heard a group of women talking reasonably together?" (144). His rhetoric seems gauged to remind readers of a key point in recent feminist debates, one most memorably discussed in Frances Power Cobbes's "Criminals, Idiots, Women and Minors" (1868) in which Cobbe argues for women's civil rights on the basis of their status as "Moral and Intelligent Being[s]" (128). Deeply chagrined, Minora trots out a common defence of the feminist cause, pointing to the essentialist argument of an extension of women's rights on the basis of their natural abilities as nurturers and care-givers:

> "But, in the sick chamber, I suppose you agree that no one could take her place? . . . ," said Minora, bewildered at the way her illusions were being knocked about[.] "[T]he sick-room is surely the very place of all others in which a woman's gentleness and tact are most valuable."
>
> "Gentleness and tact?" repeated the Man of Wrath. "I have never met those qualities in the professional nurse. According to my experience, she is a disagreeable person who finds in private nursing exquisite opportunities for asserting her superiority over ordinary and prostrate mankind. And I know of no more humiliating position for a man than to be in bed having his feverish brow soothed by a sprucely-dressed strange woman, bristling with starch and

[15] German women obtained the right to vote in 1918.

spotlessness. He would give half his income for his clothes, and probably the other half if she would leave him alone, and go away altogether". (150)

The Man of Wrath proceeds to attack women's popular idealization as Angels in the House.[16] The dismantling of such an ideal had, in fact, been an aim of feminist writers: as Virginia Woolf was to declare in "Professions for Women," "killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (286). In annihilating the Angel in the House, the Man of Wrath, however, is aiming to achieve quite a different effect:

> "If," he went on, ". . . you doubt the truth of my remarks, and still cling to the old poetic notion of noble, self-sacrificing women tenderly helping the patient over the rough places on the road to death or recovery, let me beg you to try for yourself, next time any one in our house is ill, whether the actual fact in any way corresponds to the picturesque belief. The angel who is to alleviate our sufferings comes in such a questionable shape, that to the unimaginative she appears merely as an extremely self-confident young woman, wisely concerned first of all in securing her personal comfort, much given to complaints about her food and to helplessness where she should be helpful. . . What sane man wants to have to do with angels[,] . . . especially. . .when we are sick and sorry, when we feel in every fibre what poor things we are, and when all our fortitude is needed to enable us to bear out temporary inferiority patiently, without being forced besides to assume an attitude of eager and grovelling politeness towards the angel in the house". (150-1)

[16] Coventry Patmore's poem, "The Angel in the House," was published in 1852, and set the bourgeois female ideal for the remainder of the century.

Minora meekly falls back on her last line of defence, the problem of the redundant woman and the related necessity of opening up professions to women:

> "What would you have women do, then?" asked Minora meekly. . . "There are not. . .husbands enough for every one, and the rest must do something."
>
> "Certainly," replied the oracle. "Study the art of pleasing by dress and manner as long as you are of an age to interest us, and above all, let all women, pretty and plain, married and single, study the art of cookery. If you are an artist in the kitchen you will always be esteemed". (152)

It is obvious that Minora's arguments are, by this point, completely exhausted by the Man of Wrath's facetious line of reasoning. So too, however, is the patience of even the relatively long-suffering Elizabeth and Irais, and the Man of Wrath's deferential closing capitulation to his wife and guest—"You two are exceptions to anything I may say"—suggests his recognition that the game is up (153). This interchange is significant, I would argue, not because it offers a definitive response to the "Woman Question", but because it has the effect of diminishing opinions at either extreme. Both ends of the gamut are challenged by this exchange: while Minora, as extreme feminist, is presented as something of a straw man, easily struck down by even the most spurious of arguments, the Man of Wrath deflates the position of extreme chauvinism through his deliberately ridiculous and reactionary line of reasoning.[17] What is left, I would argue, is the centre, the position that Elizabeth, Irais (and by this time, the reader) occupy, somewhere in the middle of public opinion. As moderators of the conversation, Elizabeth and Irais appear

[17] The Man of Wrath suffers the fate of most of von Arnim's male characters, whose unfailing repugnance prompted George Moore to ask von Arnim, "Why are the men in your books always disagreeable? Is the disagreeable man an integral part of your style, just as the fat woman was a part of Rubens's?" (qtd in Usborne 283).

to reflect a "middle of the road" attitude that accommodates both reactionary and revolutionary political orientations. By privileging this moderate conception of *fin-de-siècle* feminism in her book, von Arnim presents the reader with what appears to be a middlebrow type of feminism.

I am not alone in postulating the existence of such a phenomenon at the end of the nineteenth century. In *Married, Militant, and Middlebrow*, Teresa Mangum argues that New Woman writer Sarah Grand be identified as a middlebrow writer, the term "middlebrow" signifying, to her mind, an approach to literature that balances marketing savvy with calls to moderate social reform. She sees twentieth-century middlebrow culture developing out of a women's literary circuit of "readers, writers, publishers, advertisers, specialized publications, and marketing strategies," noting that women were still seen to constitute a large sector of a middlebrow readership in its twentieth century form (20). Similarly, Ann Ardis's seminal work on the New Woman novel uses terms highly suggestive of the middlebrow as we have defined it, noting in *New Novels, New Women*, that New Woman novels have often been criticized for their "aesthetic deficiency," a fault that critics saw to be rooted in their tendency to "disrupt[]. . . the conventional distinction between popular culture and high art" (3). Significantly, Ardis actually utilizes the term "middlebrow" with regard to the work of Netta Syrett, whose work is, like von Arnim's, similarly difficult to categorize.

Von Arnim's fiction fits into this category of middlebrow feminism, I would suggest, because her feminism is characterized by moderation. In fact, unlike Grand, Von Arnim never wrote polemical literature of any kind on the topic of women's issues,

preferring to use the indirect mode of fiction as a vehicle for her feminist inclination, as biographer Karen Usborne explains:

> [T]he clear-sighted novelist was not a women's rights fighter of this [obvious] kind; everything obvious was repulsive to her, and she believed that fair-minded conviction, clarity and purity of an idea were more successful than a spectacle of mass gathering. A clear idea stated simply and read by many was the preferred method of fighting injustice. Naturally she was in favour of women's rights, and the whole body of her work as well as her own life and the way she had brought up her daughters underlined her convictions, but she had never heard a woman speak convincingly on politics and poked fun continuously at the militant feminists who only succeeded in her view in making fools of themselves and harming their cause. She consciously wrote for the masses and often she was accused by her literary friends of producing potboilers and making money instead of producing art. Her answer was that she was able to write for intellectuals as well as common people and that "to give the simple people a happy hour is worth more than to brag about great works of art". (137)

With a tendency to focus on market appeal and a characteristically moderate approach to feminist reform, Elizabeth von Arnim and her work certainly appear to fall within the tradition of middlebrow feminism that Mangum has claimed for Grand. It is encouraging to find another voice in the wilderness in Mangum in terms of my argument for the existence of middlebrow culture at the *fin de siècle*. I am not ultimately satisfied, however, that the classification of middlebrow feminism does justice to the rich and complex middlebrow culture developing at the turn of the century, a culture of which

Elizabeth and Her German Garden is emblematic, drawing as it does on many social and literary conventions not limited to gender. To focus only on the New Woman aspects of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* would be problematic, if only because the novel was never explicitly identified by contemporary readers as a New Woman novel *per se*. Furthermore, it would significantly impoverish our sense of von Arnim's achievement and the legacy that flowed from it, for *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was an expression of and an imaginative antidote to a range of domestic anxieties that included a concern not just about whether women should be responsible for running the modern home, but about, for instance, where the modern home should ideally be located. More often than not the middle-class response to such a concern at the end of the nineteenth century was the suburbs. Suburban living generated an aesthetic with which von Arnim's work was explicitly linked by contemporaries. In the next chapter, I discuss the interimplication of middlebrow and suburban cultural formation at the *fin de siècle* with reference to *Elizabeth and her German Garden*.

Chapter Four
The Art of Middle-Class Living: Suburbanism and Personality at the *Fin de Siècle*

"I should not be surprised if the little book were found to please," wrote Macmillan and Company's manuscript reader, Mowbray Morris, in his report recommending von Arnim's manuscript for publication (qtd in Morgan 144). His recommendation was based, at least in part, on his observation of the likeness between von Arnim's humour and that of hugely bestselling author Jerome K. Jerome. "[H]er humour sometimes comes rather near to that of Mr. Jerome," he noted, and in so doing, placed von Arnim's novel in alignment with one of the pre-eminent authors of the suburban clerkly comedy, who had enjoyed stunning success in 1889 with *Three Men in a Boat* (144). The similarities in humour between the bumbling faux naïf narrator of Jerome K. Jerome's bestselling *Three Men in a Boat* and the whimsical, arch-witty "Elizabeth" of the German Garden may not immediately be apparent to the reader of the twenty-first century. Mowbray himself admits that Elizabeth's humour is "less vulgar and provincial" than that of Jerome, and certainly the disparately gendered focus of each text suggests very different perspectives on suburban life; however, the classification of Elizabeth von Arnim with suburban humour may in help to explain her massive contemporary success with readers at the *fin de siècle* as well as her nearly complete neglect a few decades later (144). Humour itself was somewhat antithetical to the high modern tastes that have shaped the twentieth century canon. As Frank Swinnerton notes, "[Elizabeth's] talent lay in fun, satirical portraiture, and farcical comedy, qualities which are scorned by those obsessed by what a correspondent describes to me as 'the modern dilemma'"(55). Just as importantly, however, the "suburban" as an aesthetic category has also suffered greatly under the ascendancy of high modernism and continues to pose a

problem within literary and cultural studies. In fact, the only scholars now talking about suburban aesthetics have been those concerned with the middlebrow. Nicola Humble discusses the significance of suburban living patterns on middleclass life in her study of the feminine middlebrow in the interwar period for example, noting that the suburb "changed the lives of millions of people in the years between the wars by providing them with electricity, gas, bathrooms, and indoor lavatories" (75). In fact, the suburb had begun to change the lives of the middle-classes much earlier than the interwar period. For a middle-class social sector at the turn of the century, there were in fact no problems more central to the "modern dilemma" than those of where and how to live: the suburb was often thought to offer the solution to both problems in a manner that would become significant to the development of middlebrow culture.

The Suburbs as a Discourse and a Way of Life

The history of the suburban phenomenon is a complex one, deserving of more attention than I can offer here. Suffice it to say that an explosion in urban populations, particularly in London, led to a great deal of anxiety related to the rising costs, overcrowding, and filth of city living. As modern cities came to be seen as a threat to health, the increasingly affluent middle classes looked for alternatives. One such alternative was offered by civic planners and residential builders in the form of the suburb. Historical and demographic records make it manifestly clear that England experienced a huge growth in suburbs in the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly in the case of London, whose "outer ring" grew by 50% per decade between the years 1861 and 1891 (Dyos 19). As a middleclass solution to the challenges perceived to be attendant to modernity, the suburb and the sensibilities emerging around

it serve as an early indicator of the cultural logic and habits we associate with the middlebrow. Furthermore, the modern domestic diary novel, just finding its generic feet at the *fin de siècle*, is strongly associated with suburban culture and its representation, suggesting that the suburbs are a key site for excavating the middlebrow at the end of the nineteenth century.

By all accounts, the rise of the suburbs was prompted not only by industrial and urban woes but also by a steady rise in real incomes over the nineteenth century and a staggering contemporary revolution in transportation (Read 60). While the railway, bicycle, and motorcar transported London city clerks to homes in developments such as Camberwell, Bedford Park, Brixton, Islington, Holloway, Muswell Hill, Peckham, and Broadstairs, a growth in cheap construction initiatives brought them that much closer to the middle-class dream of a snug semi-detached house complete with bay window, privet hedges, and a garden enclosure. Though Elizabeth's narrative is not set in one of these London suburbs, it tapped into the contemporary discourse of anti-metropolitan feeling among a large sector of the middle-classes. Complaining of "the horrors of a flat in a town," the newly-relocated Elizabeth laments that the first five years of her marriage were spent in town, "[the] whole interminable length [of which] I was perfectly miserable" (7). By moving from the city, she finds an escape from "a life spent with the odours of other people's dinners in one's nostrils, and the nose of their wrangling servants in one's ears, and parties and tattle for all amusement" (40).

Many of her readers had similarly found in the suburb a healthy alternative to life in the city. The suburb offered those necessaries of life indispensable to healthy existence but sadly lacking in town life, according to the *Pall Mall Gazette*, necessaries

like "air, light, wholesome water, good drainage, and sufficient house-room" ("The Growth & Distribution of the English Population" 1 Jul. 1871 5). In an era when a fair sector of British society seriously feared the racial degeneration of the nation's stock, the suburbs appeared to promise the health not only of the individual, but of the nation. "[The suburban dweller] is more alert, more active, and more elastic," remarked Sidney Low in the October 1891 issue of *Contemporary Review*, noting that the city commute "ha[s] not affected his [sic] health," but "ha[s] sharpened his faculties" ("The Rise of the Suburbs"). The suburban garden, in particular, had become an indispensable feature of healthy middle-class domestic life by the end of the nineteenth century, both in terms of private dwellings and broader residential spaces. It is no coincidence, for example, that the concept of the "garden-city" evolved in this period.[1] The fact that the suburbs provided each family with horticultural space was seen to be a distinct advantage over city living: "in the suburbs," explained well known domestic guide writer Mrs. Jane Ellen Panton, "a small garden, or even a tiny conservatory [. . .] is not an impossibility" (*From Kitchen to Garret* 2-3). The identification of suburban living with horticulture is highlighted in the names suburban dwellers chose for their homes, the most popular including names like "The Limes", "Roselands," or any number of variations on "Park" (Read 260). So closely associated were the garden and the home in this period that at, at times, the

[1] Theorized by Ebenezer Howard in *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1890), the "garden-city" was a civic plan that attempted to combine the best of city and country dwelling through open layout, size and density limitation, and the inclusion of large tracts of green space. Such cities, Howard maintained, should be limited in size and density, and should contain a self-sufficient form of industry. The fact that land ownership and value appreciation reverted to the community associated it with the writings of Robert Owen much earlier in the century. However, the plan took on a distinctly "modern" feel as Howard organized a *Garden City Association* (1899) to make these plans a financial reality; indeed, we see the fruits of his labour in the modern municipal prototypes of Letchworth and Welwyn (both in Hertfordshire, the former before WWI and the latter after WWI). The garden city ideal could not always be realized. Instead, we see the development of garden-suburbs in their place, one of the first and most fully realized being Hampstead Garden Suburb, completed in 1907.

garden seems to have stood in metaphorically for the home in discourses of domesticity. According to garden historian Charles Quest-Ritson, gardens and homes were closely intertwined in the contemporary imaginary: he points to evidence such as an 1860 article in *Floral World* which cited the "increase and prosper" of floricultural societies as "evidence of the healthiness of domestic life in England," explaining that "societies for the encouragement of horticulture are by their very nature civilizing" (205). Thus "a genuine love for flowers" was seen to be a facet of "the love of home," and "the keeping of a good garden, like the upkeep of the interior, was evidence of an upright household" (qtd in Quest-Ritson 205). Furthermore, for many suburban homemakers, the garden became a suburb in itself, offering escape from the business and anxiety of the home in which they worked. "[T]housands now seek in their gardens that rest and refreshment from daily toil afforded by no other recreation" claimed a writer for *Country Life* ("English and Continental Gardens" 646-7), and indeed, this was a sentiment with which "Elizabeth" could agree: "The garden is the place I go to for refuge and shelter," she maintained, "not the house" (33). In fact, this displacement of anxiety upon the house and away from the garden may be an indicator of the abovementioned domestic anxieties emerging around the professionalization of home-making. The *Weekly Sun* found this displacement curious enough to remark upon, noting that Elizabeth "bothers her head very little with the domestic considerations that make a great part of a . . . wife's home life"; "[I]n place of these" it continues, "she ha[s] her garden, which is given great prominence throughout her diary" (October 23, 1898). The suburban garden had also, by the 1890s, come to be associated with the "ordinary" and "everyday" aesthetic so embraced by middlebrow writers such as Jan Struther. This had not always been the

case. Early nineteenth-century gardening had, taking its cue from formal practises of the eighteenth century, embraced the expensive and painstaking practise of "bedding out" and of reproducing Italianate and Tudor models, with the result that gardens were the preserve of a landed elite whose ready capital and extensive parkland allowed them access to such luxuries. However, modern innovations began to extend the base of gardening within the second half of the century. "Gardening in England is changing its complexion," claimed a journalist in *Country Life* ("About Water Gardens" 455), and indeed, by the end of the century, the garden had morphed from an elite accessory of upper-class living to a ubiquitous feature of middle-class suburban life. According to E. T. Cook, a new and broad interest in gardening was "among the many transformations which the end of the century has brought us" (*Century Book of Gardening* iii). While the extension of the railway allowed a large sector of the middle classes to visit gardens and nurseries, the expansion of the suburbs offered them an unprecedented amount of green space for cultivation. Furthermore, a fall in postal rates allowed a greater circulation of plant catalogues and gardening correspondence, and the growing efficiency of plant importation to Britain from its empire meant that people had access to a new range of plants suitable to a suburban budget and plot-size (Quest-Ritson 184-85; 219). Perhaps the most important factor in the democratization of the garden, however, was the growing accessibility of gardening guides and literature for gardeners of every level of experience

The "thirst for the knowledge of the flower life around us" is "delightfully characteristic of the present age," claimed the author of "Literary Notes" in *Country Life* (670), and indeed, if that thirst for knowledge was evidenced in the efflorescence of gardening literature being produced in the period, the English must have been parched.

We see the founding of periodicals such as *Floral World* (1858) and *Amateur Gardening* (1884), as well as a growing number of gardening columns within periodicals, including *Country Life*'s "In the Garden" and Gertrude Jekyll's "Notes from Garden and Woodland" in *The Guardian*. The same period saw a rise in the publication of gardening manuals, calendars, and handbooks, particularly those with a suburban interest: thus readers had access not only to books like E. T. Cook's *Century Book of Gardening* (1899) and *Gardening for Beginners* (1901), but also to books specifically targeting suburban gardeners, such as Roma White's *Twixt Town and Country* (1900) and F. M. Wells's *The Suburban Garden and What to Grow in It* (1901). Just as the trope of horticulture played an important role in the ideological economy of interwar middlebrow domestic diaries like *Mrs. Miniver* and the *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, discourses of horticulture were interimplicated with the middle-class ideology of suburban living, a relationship which will be explored later in the chapter through reference to the associations between gardening manuals and the diary form of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*.

What is most important to note here, however, is that, as a result of this spate of suburban gardening literature, readers seemed to gain a new sense of confidence about cultivating a uniquely suburban aesthetic. For example, a gardening columnist for *Country Life* assured readers that a tiny brick terrace plot could "be made as enjoyable in its way as the loftiest domain," and could in fact be more enjoyable, because its scale and proportion were more in keeping with humanity in a suburban garden: "the element of personal interest is certainly stronger," the columnist argued, pointing out that, in contrast with visitors in stately gardens, visitors in suburban gardens "d[on't] look out of scale with their surroundings " ("English and Continental Gardens" 646-7). The *fin-de-siecle*

suburban garden thus offers tribute to the ingenuity of the middle classes, who transformed the challenge of modern urbanization into an opportunity to develop an aesthetic of living specifically suited to bourgeois needs and tastes. As we will see, it was just such a modern interest in suburban gardening that helped to sell von Arnim's novel.

In fact, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* seems initially to have sold under the mistaken auspices of the "how-to" gardening manual. Indeed, one reviewer even complained that "even the amateur gardener will be disappointed, for he will find therein no tips as to the best methods of grafting apples, or of destroying vermin. . ." (qtd by Howard vii). Certainly its form contributed to this mistake, for though a diary novel, its entries were organized around the horticultural calendar and tended to pay a high degree of attention to the characters of each season, as the following entry for September 15th illustrates:

> This is the month of quiet days, crimson creepers, and blackberries; of mellow afternoons in the ripening garden; of tea under the acacias instead of the too shady beeches; of wood-fires in the library in the chilly evenings. . .the summer seems as though it would dream on forever. It is hard to believe that in three months we shall probably be snowed up and certainly be cold. There is a feeling about this month that reminds me of March and the early days of April, when spring is still hesitating on the threshold and the garden holds its breath in expectation. There is the same mildness in the air, and the sky and grass have the same look as then; but the leaves tell a different tale, and the reddening creeper on the house is rapidly approaching its last and loveliest glory." (64)

One might compare Elizabeth's narrative with gardening columns in the contemporary popular and gardening presses—epitomized in Gertrude Jekyll's well-received "Notes from Garden and Woodland" for the *Guardian* from 1896—such columns following the vegetable calendar, engaging in poetic description of the seasons, and offering practical advice and tips to gardeners. Or perhaps Elizabeth might find more kinship in books like Mrs. Earle's highly successful *Potpourri from a Surrey Garden*, which was organized around the seasons but assumed a far greater scope than the typical gardening manual. Earle declared her hybrid purpose for writing in her first entry, asserting, "I am not going to write a gardening book, or a cookery book, or a book on furnishings or education [. . .] I merely wish to talk to you on paper about several subjects as they occur to me throughout the year" (1). In fact, Earle was forthright about the fact that her domestic diary was designed, to a certain extent, to promote suburban living: while some readers, she claims, have a tendency to "sneer [. . .] over the obvious disadvantages of suburban residences," she declares her intention to focus her readers' attention on the "immense advantages" of suburban living and gardening (289). Similarly, Elizabeth's diary was more than a suburban-gardening narrative—it reflected a larger concern with suburban aesthetics more broadly defined as an ethos of modern living, an ethos that closely resembles the middlebrow cultural formation we have been discussing.

The suburban ethos reflects a middlebrow investment in moderation as a kind of geographical expression. We have discussed the value placed by the middlebrow on the state of "betwixt and between," a state which the suburban embodies. By moving from the urban center to its rural periphery, suburban dwellers hoped to strike an optimal balance between city and country living. In 1898, Ebenezer Howard articulated the

vision for the hybrid residential utopia: "Town and country *must be* married, and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization" (Howard 10). In true middlebrow form, moderation was a guiding principle of suburban life and sensibilities, and, like the middlebrow readers of the interwar years, suburban-dwellers found moderation through hybridity.[2] In the words of John Gross, "the suburban dweller wanted the Englishman's castle and the pleasure of the countryside but also affordable lodging and a location convenient to his work" (23). But moving from the urban center to its periphery also allowed the suburban dweller to indulge a penchant for the kind of conservation practices we have identified with *Mrs. Miniver*, that of maximizing the present while preserving the past. According to Alun Howkins, the new suburban builds were, more often than not, dominated by nostalgic architectural styles. The preference for Tudor-style housing, in particular, was marked, even in the first of the middle-class ruralist suburbs, Bedford Park. Civic planners like Norman Shaw and E. W. Godwin saw such appropriations of historical architecture as a strategy by which to merge the best of the past with the present:

> The whole place has the snug warm look of having been inhabited for at least a century. This comes partly from the color and material of the houses, a mellow red brick; partly from their architecture, which may be called "Queen Anne," abounding in gables, and permitting all kinds of inequality in height and irregularities of frontage; and partly from the intermixture of fine old trees, looking almost ancient. (qtd in Howkins "Discovery" 73).

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[2] As early as 1857, Charles Kingsley was noting the way in which the suburb appeared to offer "a complete interpenetration of city and of country, a complex fusion of the different modes of life, and a combination of the advantages of both" (qtd in Read 59).

Furthermore, Howkins points out, the gardens surrounding each suburban home also "spoke to an imagined rural past" ("Discovery" 82). As evidence, he quotes Stanley Baldwin's assertion as representative of a fairly popular contemporary consensus dating from the late nineteenth century: "nothing can be more touching than to see how the working man and woman after generations in the town will have their tiny bit of garden if they can, will go to gardens if they can, to look at something they have never seen as children, but which their ancestors knew and loved" ("Discovery" 82). Furthermore, English gardens were increasingly associated with the cultivation of "old fashioned" flowers by the end of the century. As garden enthusiast Mrs. Loftie wrote in 1875, "we rejoice heartily at the turn of the wheel which has given us back those dear old flowers. Queen Anne has come into her own again. . . turkscape lilies and stately hollyhocks, ..lavender and lupin, . . .passion flowers and musk roses" (qtd in Quest Ritson 206). Similarly, Robert Louis Stevenson included in his description of "The Ideal House" the following note about the ideal garden: "The old flowers are the best and should grow carelessly in corners. Indeed, the ideal fortune is to find an old garden, once richly cared for, since sunk into neglect, and to tend, not repair, that neglect" (188) . The fact that the aesthetic of the modern suburban garden was essentially old-fashioned reflects the Janus-face of middle-class responses to modernity at the *fin de siècle*, investing in a version of "the new" that was deeply indebted to the past. The irony of this "newness" was not lost on Elizabeth, who records the following dialogue between herself and her gardener:

> "I shall want a great many daffodils next spring," I shouted one day [to the gardener] at the beginning of our acquaintance.

> His eyes gleamed. "Ah yes," he said with immediate approval, "they are *sehr modern*."
>
> I was divided between amusement at the notion of Spenser's daffadowndillies being *modern*, and indignation at hearing exactly the same adjective applied to them that the woman who sells me my hats bestows on the most appalling examples of her stock. (*Solitary Summer* 20)

Both the suburban home and the suburban garden became central loci for *fin-de-siecle* cultural conservation along the lines associated with the middlebrow. The suburb offered the late nineteenth-century middle classes the opportunity to maximize the aesthetics of their daily life by combining the architectural and gardening trends of a past era with a new and unprecedented sense of the possibilities of modern living.

The Suburban Sensibility

That the golden residential mean of the suburb—a perfect balance between city and country, past and present--was ever truly realized by the suburban dweller is doubtful. Certainly, the suburb fell short of social expectation in several regards.[3] However, historians have commented that it is the suburban sensibility, as much as the reality, which constitutes a significant influence in the period. H. J. Dyos points out that suburbanism should perhaps be seen as "associated less with a geographical expression than an attitude of mind and a species of social as well as economic behaviour" (26). Embracing and yet cautious of change, invested in the past and what it might accomplish in the present, and dedicated to "ordinary" and "everyday" living, the *fin-de-siècle*

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[3] For further discussion, see Lara Whelan's "Unburying Bits of Rubbish: Deconstruction of the Victorian Suburban Ideal".

suburban sensibility bears more than a passing resemblance to what we have identified as the middlebrow. It is possible to see this suburban "way of life" as at least a proto-middlebrow form in its cultural logic, adumbrating the social, cultural, and economic orientation of middlebrow consumers in the interwar years.

Shared denigration alone might suggest the symmetry of the suburban and the middlebrow. Certainly, the antipathy of cultural commentators towards suburban literature at the time established a legacy of denigration that sounds familiar to anybody conversant with the *avant garde* critique of the middlebrow. We hear in notorious aesthete Oscar Wilde's critique of bourgeois aesthetics near the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the cadences of Woolf's highbrow invective against the middlebrow several decades later. When asked, "What is civilization?," Wilde is reported to have responded, "Love of beauty". "And what is beauty?," he was asked, to which he responded, "That which the middle classes call ugly" (qtd in Read 275). Annette Federico points out that the opposition between cosmopolitan aestheticism and a suburban aesthetic had hardened into a familiar binary by the end of the nineteenth century, a binary which privileged aestheticism at the expense of suburbanism. "The cosmopolitan-suburban construct," Federico writes, "privileges aestheticism, which is associated with young men, explorations of life, and the 'wizardry of cities,' rather than suburbia, which is associated with feminine domesticity, homogeneity, and the delights of nature (or, at least, of a small garden)" (66-67). Like the middlebrow, suburbia became stereotyped as "petty" and "unimaginative," the site of "weak-brained materialists" and "triviality," in contrast with an aestheticist cosmopolitanism (Carey 52), a critique which sounds sneakingly like the one leveled at the middlebrow several decades later.

Of course, neither a shared set of sensibilities nor a common history of abuse is enough to link *fin-de-siecle* suburbanism with the interwar middlebrow. Instead we must measure the degree to which suburban literary culture fulfils the criteria set out by cultural historians and demonstrates the preoccupations and generic investments we have associated with the middlebrow. Finally, by comparing suburban and middlebrow aesthetics within a single generic context—the domestic diary novel—we discover a symmetry that confirms the close relationship between the two aesthetic discourses.

Like middlebrow literature, suburban literature has posed something of a problem for literary historians insofar as they have reached very little consensus regarding what the term actually denominates. More often than not, it is used with reference to the suburban clerkly comedy, a comedic literature which emerged alongside the growth of clerk culture and lower-class suburban life in the second half of the nineteenth century. The most familiar of the species are Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, which chronicles the holiday travels and mishaps of a small group of clerks, and Thomas and Weedon Grossmith's *The Diary of a Nobody*, which relates the daily life of a London clerk, Mr. Pooter, and his family in the suburb of Holloway during the late 1880s. The association between clerkly culture and the suburbs is a well-established one: London clerks made up a high proportion of the breadwinners living in the suburbs. However, the suburban clerkly comedy has come to be almost synonymous with suburban literature, so much so that in the introduction to the Penguin edition of *The Diary of a Nobody*, Ed Glinert refers to the suburbs as "Pooterland" (xxi). Certainly this equation is responsible for suburban literature being seen as characterized by humour and self-parody. Both *Three Men and a Boat* (1889) and *The Diary of a Nobody* (1892) were associated with

popular magazine humor, Jerome K. Jerome having helped to found *The Idler* in 1892 and *The Diary of a Nobody* –dubbed by Evelyn Waugh "the funniest book in the world"—having been serialized in *Punch* (May 1888-May 1889) before its publication in book form (qtd in Glinert vii).

As fruitful an association as it may be, however, the equation of suburban literature with the clerkly comedy is a dangerously limited one. Not only does it represent a fairly limited experience of suburban life, but its satirical and sometimes absurd self-deprecation may reinforce cultural antipathy toward suburban culture and thus contribute to the inertia of literary historians to attend to suburban literature as a cohort. Unfortunately, literary historians have tended to accept the contemporary denigration of suburban culture with as little critical consideration as that of the middlebrow. When reference to suburban literature does appear in current literary histories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is often relegated to a footnote or attributed the status of a historical anomaly. In *The Modern Novel*, for example, Malcolm Bradbury interrupts his commentary on the trajectory of "the new" in *fin-de-siècle* fiction to note the aberration of suburban literature: "Admittedly, the British book of 1889 was Jerome K. Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat*, a suburban clerkly comedy that would lead on to George and Weedon Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (1892), the very ordinary and politely bourgeois story of Mr. Pooter, of the Laurels, Brickfield Terrace, Holloway" (50). Bradbury gives the reader the sense that the suburban clerkly comedy hardly merits a mention in an account of *modern* literature, despite the fact that such literature focuses almost entirely on life in the suburbs, a manifestly modern innovation.

The equation of the suburban clerkly comedy and suburban literature as a category is also limited because it stresses such a small range of suburban concerns and interests. For example, the clerkly comedy, for obvious reasons, highlights a masculine rather than feminine experience of the suburbs. To assume that the clerkly comedy presents us with a representative picture of suburban culture would significantly distort our perspective of suburban living, for contemporary commentaries suggest that the suburbs tended to be seen as woman-dominated residential sectors: "[O]n all days except Sunday," T. H. W. Crosland complains in *The Suburbans* (1905), "[suburbia] is a country whose population consists almost wholly of women, children, and taxgatherers" (20-1).

Furthermore, to equate suburban literature with the clerkly comedy would be to miss out on the range of literary manifestations that contemporaries associated with suburbanism. Crosland's denigration of suburban life, though crass, is illuminating in this regard, for his complaints about suburbia extend to suburban reading habits. The suburbs are responsible, Crosland maintains, for the "latest outbreak of literary vulgarity": the commercial development of "cheap classics," inexpensive reprint editions of out-of-copyright books. He complains,

> The rush for low-priced classics has been a mean, discreditable suburban rush, if ever there was one. It is Suburbia that purchases these grisly books, and Suburbia alone. Show me a house with its rows of skimpily-bound, undersized shilling or eighteen-penny volumes, and I will show you a house in which the spirit of Dalston and Clapham and Surbiton and Crouch End rules supreme. (187-8)

In a tone reminiscent of the middlebrow's detractors, Crosland decries not only the marriage of commerce and high art, but what he sees as the hypocrisy of commercialism masquerading as cultural altruism:

> There are people in the world who approve of the whole proceeding. They argue that publishing and bookselling are of no importance as opposed to the spread of the light. Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Dryden, Pope, Burns, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Keats, Byron, Hazlitt, and out-of-copyright Browning, with a top-dressing of Marcus Aurelius, Omar Khayyam, and Epictetus, are the light, and the sale of them in hundreds of thousands, and for next to nothing, is good for the world. (187)

If the classification "suburban literature" meant anything to Crosland, then, it seemed to refer to suburban literary consumption, as well as literature devoted to representing suburban life. Furthermore, it was associated with an aesthetic that was geared toward consumption and self-cultivation, two characteristics we have come to identify with a middlebrow cultural formation.

If we allow this definition of suburbanism as a specific form of literary consumption and marketing to stand, however, we are faced with the problem of gauging the actual consumption patterns of suburban readers--a task rather too large and abstruse for this particular study. In response to this difficulty, I have decided against any attempt at a close examination of sales records and demographics, choosing instead to draw from some of the groundwork laid recently by historians of *fin-de-siecle* literary consumption. Such a choice has hidden benefits, for in examining these recent studies, I discovered that the "problem" of suburban literary history may be less about scholarly neglect than

about scholars' reticence to embrace a classificatory term—suburban—which, like the middlebrow, has become chronically employed as a term of abuse. I am thinking, for example, of Annette Federico's study of Marie Corelli, a *fin-de-siecle* novelist whose work had notorious suburban appeal. Though Federico never uses the denomination "suburban literature" to describe Corelli's work *per se*, the study is meaningfully titled *Idol of Suburbia*. Federico's avoidance of the term "suburban literature" may in part be explained by the fact that the term had already begun to take on a derogatory nuance by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. It was more often than not her detractors, according to a 1909 *Bookman* review of Corelli's work, that associate Corelli with the suburban, dubbing her "the idol [. . .] and delight of Suburbia" (qtd in Federico 84). Federico will admit to Corelli's commercial interests, noting her status as the author of such bestsellers as *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) and *Wormwood* (1890). However, Federico claims that Corelli must be credited with having merged commercial interest with *avant garde* aestheticist tastes, creating a subversive hybrid that Federico ends up calling "aestheticism in suburbia" or "democratic aestheticism," even though, within late-Victorian sensibilities, Corelli's work seems mainly to have been associated with a distinctly "suburban" taste. Furthermore, Federico herself seems often to confirm this association, claiming, for instance, that Corelli was preoccupied with catering to "an audience who, as typical suburbanites, desired both celebrity and conservatism" (86). Finally, by claiming for Corelli's readers a new cultural logic that "good taste is no longer an expensive luxury to indulge in" (56), Federico appears to be articulating a principle of accessibility in close alignment with the suburban mentality described above. However, despite the fact that she sees this "democratic strain of

aestheticism" to be manifested in several aspects of suburban life, Federico never actually cites her as exemplary of a suburban aesthetic, but instead chooses to present her as a kind of isolated historical problem of cultural classification

Federico's claim for Corelli's status as a literary anomaly would be more believable, perhaps, if there were not several other late Victorian writers cast by literary historians in a similar position. Barbara Gates presents similar anomalies in Gertrude Jekyll and Vernon Lee, for instance, two hugely popular *fin-de-siecle* writers whose books helped to shape late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conceptions of suburban garden and travel, respectively. Gates also seems to be in denial about Jekyll and Lee's manifestly suburban associations: she labours to identify them as advocates of a highly quixotic form of natural aestheticism, even though she admits that both writers' commitments to marketing their work tends to inhibit any association literary historians might previously have drawn between their work and traditional *fin-de- siècle* aestheticism. "[T]he women I have mentioned were eager to aestheticize the natural and to promote their aestheticism socially and/or commercially," writes Gates, noting that while Jekyll's garden-writing might, in its delineation and discussion of natural beauty, be aligned with aestheticism, Jekyll was certainly exploiting a commercial translation of it, "writing newspaper columns, responding to correspondence, and generating a large number of popular publications" (162).

In fact, attempts have recently been made to corral these anomalies into a uniform classification, the most significant being that of Talia Schaffer and Kathy Alexis Psomiades in *Women and British Aestheticism* in which they suggest a new category of women's aestheticism. I admire the attempt to explain these "anomalies"; however, I

cannot help but feel that such a concept would carry more weight if it could account for the lasting legacy of such writing that we have noted in the form of interwar middlebrow feminine novels. No attempt has been made, for example, to account for *Mrs. Miniver* and the *Diary of a Provincial Lady* as woman aesthetes, and, indeed, I do not think that such a classification would be appropriate. It is difficult to conceive of a humour more foreign to Wilde's aestheticist wit and affectation than Delafield's wry self-deprecation

The above are just a few analyses of suburban literature that seem to deny the obvious, creating new classification for literature rather than subject it to the classification "suburban" with its less than flattering connotations.[4] The impulse to associate such anomalies with aestheticism is an understandable one in the sense that it reflects a wish to raise the literary fortunes of a group of writers who have been not just neglected but denigrated by a mainstream literary establishment. They may even be right to do so; however, might it not be just as possible that "suburban" literature is in fact the more accurate classification, for these manifestly suburban writers who demonstrate that curious and complex hybridity that we associate with a suburban ethos?

What I am suggesting is that suburban literature might be seen to function along the lines of the residential suburb itself. Like the suburb—which is neither fully city nor country, neither fully past nor present—suburban literature merges the higher and lower poles of contemporary literature. By casting numerous instances as isolated aberrations,

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[4] Furthermore, in *Idylls of the Marketplace*, Regina Gagnier has attempted, in a similar vein, to postulate an "aestheticism from the point of view of consumption, or of the different publics that, in different ways, consumed it" (67). She notes that "the many strands of aestheticism that were being woven into the literary and commercial markets of the period" with the effect that we see a range of "adaptations and contrivances" which together "make up a continuum between the consummately aesthetic and the utterly bourgeois"(Gagnier 93). She does not, however, link this discovery to larger patterns in English demography and class development, nor does she elaborate on the twentieth-century legacy of such a phenomenon.

Gates and Federico have blinded us to the feature that unite these anomalies and that furthermore implicates them in a larger pattern of literary and cultural practices: hybridity. What Corelli and Jekyll have in common with, say, Jerome, the Grossmiths, and Elizabeth von Arnim, is a commitment to cultural hybridity and mediation, the values that we have seen associated with one significant lived middle-class response to modernity: the suburbs. As we examine the logic that defines suburban literature as a cohort, we end up with a profile that bears more than a passing resemblance to the one we associate with the middlebrow. This is particularly true in the case of the *fin-de-siècle* domestic diary, whose development casts light on the way in which a middlebrow culture coalesced as a hybrid of competing cultural discourses of domestic life at the end of the nineteenth century. As the reader will recall, Radway insists, in her delineation of middlebrow culture, that the middlebrow was constituted by the subversive merging of two competing discourses of the book—a higher, traditional, literary conception of the book as cultural artifact, and a lower, commercial and utility-oriented conception of the book as commodity. Furthermore, Radway contends that this fusion was instituted in such a manner as to balance a taste for the modern and the *avant garde* with a more traditional and humanistic aesthetic. She sees this merging as occurring in the interwar years, even though, by her own admission, these discourses were well in place by the end of the nineteenth century. In fact, we see such a merging of high and low cultural discourses in the *fin de siècle* in suburban literature in general, and particularly in domestic diary novels such as *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. By highlighting the relationship between the suburban and the middlebrow, I do not intend to suggest an uncomplicated equation of the two concepts. Rather, I find helpful the nuances that the

concept of the suburban brings to a discussion of the middlebrow. Our focus on a suburban ethos may well help us recognize middlebrow culture at the *fin de siècle*. At the very least, however, it is useful in reminding us that cultural formation is not limited to a certain genre, or manner of reading, but must be extended to include a whole approach to the art of living in the state of modernity.

Modernity and the Art of Living

Elizabeth and her German Garden emerged in a decade of unprecedented self-consciousness about both the practices and aesthetics of living. In the words of Holbrook Jackson, the decade of the 1890s "was a time when people went about frankly and cheerfully endeavouring to solve the question 'How to Live'" (33). It is probably not surprising then that such a question of "lifestyle" should be explored through the period's literature, nor that the higher and lower poles of English culture generated vastly different answers to that question. Two distinct lifestyle discourses evolved along the higher and lower poles of contemporary culture at the *fin de siècle*: the most prominent lifestyle discourse associated with high culture in the period was unquestionably aestheticism, while the lower tended to embrace a discourse of self-help. Domestic diary novels such as *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* creatively bridged the gap between those poles, offering up a modern art of living that was distinctly middlebrow in nature.

One of the most memorable *fin-de-siecle* solutions to the problem of "how to live" was offered by proponents of aestheticism. Few aesthetic movements took the aesthetics of living so seriously, nor theorized it so boldly. "[T]he making of one's life into art is after all the first duty and privilege of every man," asserted prominent aesthete Arthur Symons, basing his assertion on the logic that, in this unprecedented period of modern

alienation, society had to turn to "the only verities that had not seemed to crumble while it watched: the cultivation of the self, the consolation of art" (xviii). The legacy of the Romantics inspired the aestheticists' faith in the personality and "autonomy" of the artist (Pittock 18), whose genius for art and living marked him out as one of the chosen few, elevated above the common modern herd. Certainly such a faith was articulated in *Le Dandy*, a text influential on aestheticism, in which Baudelaire details an art of living characterized by "an immoderate taste for fine clothes and material elegance," symbols of one's "aristocratic superiority of mind" (qtd in Beckson 34-5). Thus the dandyish mode of living practiced and theorized by aesthetes was "itself art, the individuated art which expressed the subjectivity of the self while emphasizing its value" (qtd in Beckson 62).

It is important to note here one of the most significant differences between *avant garde* aestheticism and the "suburban aestheticism" postulated by Federico, and implied by Gates. The *avant garde* artist of living was born and not bred. As celebrated aesthete Oscar Wilde had his protagonist Gilbert declare in signature epigrammatic style, "Technique is really personality. That is why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it and why the aesthetic critic can understand it" (*The Critic as Artist Pt. 2* 159). The movement added further esotericism through reference to the work of Walter Pater, who has been credited as the source of aestheticism's religious inflection. By famously inverting the terms of William Laud's famous dictim "beauty of holiness" to reflect a new, modern aesthetic faith in the "holiness of beauty" (Pittock 19), the work of Pater helped to elevate the aesthetic art of living yet another degree beyond the access of the average reader. This stands in stark contrast with the work of writers like Corelli, Jekyll and Lee who, according to their respective apologists, were attempting to increase

the accessibility of aesthetic principles of living to a mass readership through popular publication. I would argue that they appear to have more in common with a suburban aesthetic of accessibility that attempted to merge the high aesthetic "art of living" with the much lower cultural ethos of that staple of the popular press, the self-help book.

In contrast with aestheticism, which was committed to art for art's sake, popular reading embraced an art with practical uses. Thus its response to the *fin-de-siècle* question "how to live" tended to be a practical one. Radway describes the popular reading tastes that formed the lower pole from which the middlebrow drew in their hybrid efforts:

> The literary book developed in [the] late nineteenth-century . . . at least in part to counter the influence and feared effects of cheap circulating books. Explicitly designed for rapid and distracted reading, those cheap books did indeed lend themselves to perusal in the interstices of daily life, that is, during commuting, during brief breaks from work, and at the end of a long and tiring day. They severed reading's traditional connection to religious and scholarly meditation and contemplation and yoked it as an activity to the achievement of more immediate effects, be they pleasure, the acquisition of information, or simply passing the time. . . . In effect, late nineteenth-century readers were given many more opportunities by the cheap book trade to purchase a book with the intent of treating it transitively as a utilitarian tool for the achievement of an immediate goal. (142)

Far from embracing the concept of artistic taste as a natural byproduct of genius; late Victorian popular prose nurtured the belief that taste could be cultivated by any reader

committed to undertaking the hard work of acquiring it. Furthermore, while the anxieties of modernity prompted aesthetes to replace religion with art, those same anxieties seem to have prompted popular readers to replace religion with self-cultivation, or so historians of reading have surmised: the Victorian period saw the "steady sellers" of devotional literature challenged by the growth of a new breed of handbook, one that replaced religious transformation and social etiquette with a gospel of "self-culture" (Rubin 17). The self-culture movement gained impetus in England in the second half of the nineteenth-century through the popular works of self-help enthusiasts like Samuel Smiles. Published in November 1859, his bestselling *Self-Help* went into no less than fifty reprints by 1901.[5] In it, Smiles makes explicit the fundamental credo of the self-culture movement in its preface, reminding his reader "that nothing creditable can be accomplished without application and diligence—that [one] must not be daunted by difficulties but conquer them by patience and perseverance-- and that above all, [one] must seek elevation of character without which capacity is worthless and worldly success is naught" (qtd in Richards 53). The book originated in an address to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society in 1845. "Welcome to all such aspirations!" lectured Smiles, "Welcome the education which shall make men respect themselves, and aim at higher privileges and greater liberties than they now enjoy!" (qtd in Sinnema xi). Clearly the aristocracy Smiles espoused, in contrast with the aestheticist's aristocracy, was taught, not born fully formed. In a chapter entitled "Character - The True Gentleman," for example, Smiles endorses a moral, rather than a pedigreed definition of gentility: "The True Gentleman is one whose nature has been fashioned after highest models. His

[5] This number is quoted by Richards, p. 52. Smiles' popular sequels included *Character* (1871); *Thrift* (1875); and *Duty* (1880).

qualities depend not upon fashion or manners, but upon moral worth" (326). Furthermore, he prefaces the chapter with a quotation from the *Times*, which asserts the value to England of the man of Character: "this aristocracy is not an aristocracy of blood, not an aristocracy of fashion, not an aristocracy of talent only; it is an aristocracy of Character. That is the true heraldry of man" (314).

Certainly Smiles is responsible for a great deal of English readers' interest in popular self-cultivation in the second half of the nineteenth century, manifesting itself in a proliferation of hand-books for the auto-didact, popular and serious presses together printing "how-to" books on a range of subjects, from reading itself—of which Noah Porter's *Books and Reading: What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them?* (1851) was just one—to household chores and outdoor pursuits. In fact, so familiar was the self-help movement within the middle and lower classes that it came in for parody at the hands of Jerome K. Jerome, whose clerk George asserts his skill on the banjo despite never having played before, declaring, "it's very easy, they tell me; and I've got the instruction books!" (63).

Smiles also set a precedence for self-culture narratives by drawing on biographical case studies as prime evidence for the real life success of "men born in lowly stations" attaining distinction "by industry, integrity, and perseverance" (xiii). Despite shifts in content and tone, the biographical case study continued (and arguably continues still) to be the most popular vehicle for illustration within self-help prose. The fact that the biographical case study demonstrates the art of living as a work in progress is significant within a discussion of middlebrow precursors, for in our discussion of *Mrs. Miniver* and *Diary of a Provincial Lady* we have already encountered a literary genre that

lends itself to the self-reflexive representation of the subject and to processes of cultivation over increments of time: the diary novel.

Before returning to the diary novel, however, it is important to note the emergence of a cultural discourse at the end of the nineteenth century that was beginning to merge the higher and lower approaches to life- and self-style that we have been discussing. While the discourses of self-help made so popular by Smiles depended heavily on discourses of self-cultivation, this new discourse applied these same self-cultivating methods to a medium synonymous with aestheticism: the personality. In "Personality and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture," Warren Susman historicizes the development of this new discourse of subjectivity that offered "a new vision of the self" which significantly departed from the character-based vision of the self predominant for most of the nineteenth century. Manuals such as Smiles's *Self-Help* had unquestionably focused attention on character, utilizing a set of vocabulary that reflected this focus: Sussman notes the prevalence of words like "citizenship," "duty," "honour," "reputation," "morals," and "integrity," for example, in this literature (274). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, a distinctly different paradigm of self-culture was emerging: focused on "personality," rather than character, it highlighted "individual idiosyncrasies, personal needs, and interests" and carried with it a whole new vocabulary, including words like "fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative. . ." (Sussman 277; 276). Sussman is quite right to source some of this change in *fin-d- siecle* developments in psychology and psychiatry (275). In describing this new discourse of personality as an attempt to combine the qualities of works on character with a discourse of a "religious and even mystical—or spiritual vision of the self," Sussman

seems to be missing the influence of aestheticism. Personality's definition as "the fulfilment of the self by a striving to become one with a higher self" does sound strangely akin to aestheticism's merging of art with a secular strain of transcendentalism (276). "The vision of self-sacrifice," Sussman summarizes, "began to yield to that of self-realization" (276). Despite the association with aestheticism, the fact that personality was seen to be open to cultivation distinctly aligns it with a lower cultural discourse of literary utility. Sussman is explicit about the implication of discourses of personality in a new consumer culture. As we will discover in Chapter Five, this link between marketing and personality took on new importance with the birth of modern practices like branding.

Certainly personality helped to sell *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* among other middlebrow cultural products of the *fin de siècle*. Like *Mrs. Miniver* and the *Diary of the Provincial Lady*, the draw of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* was due, in no small part, to the charisma of its narrator. In this sense, the *fin-de-siècle* domestic diary novel can be seen to reflect the values of personality and individualism that historians of the middlebrow such as Janice Radway have identified as a key characteristic of middlebrow culture by the interwar period. "The charm of the book," recognized the reviewer of *The Times* in terms which adumbrate *Mrs. Miniver*'s praise "lies [. . .] in its personal atmosphere, its individuality of sentiment, its healthy sympathy with nature and outdoor life, its shrewd but kindly appreciation of character and social circumstance" (qtd. in Howard viii). The reviewer for *The Athenaeum* described the book's narrator as "one of those rare beings whose companionship is curiously interesting and satisfying" (19 Nov. 1898 711).

Readers found in personality manuals and related literature the promise that they too could cultivate themselves as modern works of art. Sussman points out, however, that the *fin-de-siècle* discourse of personality should never be confused with mere charm or whimsy. There existed a hard-line angle of time and energy regulation within this middlebrow approach to the modern subject. While Sussman offers American examples, England provides many of her own, one of the most notorious in this period being Arnold Bennett, whose *oeuvre*—typical of the middlebrow—included both naturalist novels and self-help literature. Bennett was one of the most popular proponents of personality literature. His writing focused on expanding what he called "the principles of the art of living" through volumes like *Human Machine* (1908) and *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* (1908). Though he defined the art of living as "the expression of the soul by means of the body" (*Human Machine* 15), it is important to note that Bennett's principles were aligned with the type of conservation practices we have previously discussed with relation to middlebrow culture. In *Human Machine* he encourages his readers to "think rationally about living" (20) and to consider their body and mind as "the most fascinating bit of machinery that ever was" (11). In *How to Live. . .*, he exhorts readers, furthermore, to devote themselves to "the minute practical examination of daily time-expenditure (19). What is most significant about this new discourse of personality was its hybridity. While a higher discursive strand—aestheticism—was responsible for the idea that daily living was worthy of minute aesthetic attention, the lower strand—utilitarian and commercial books—provided readers with the sense that such an art of living was achievable through careful cultivation and self-regulation. Furthermore, far from being antithetical, whimsy and self-discipline were seen to be two side of the cultivatory coin

that formed the dominant currency in a modern middlebrow cultural formation at the *fin de siècle*.

It is no coincidence that, during a decade in which aestheticism was vaunting an art of living that self-help prose was claiming to be able to cultivate, the domestic diary novel was born. The domestic diary novel allowed readers to celebrate the aestheticization of daily living through a first-person biographical case study. I want to note here that the development of the form was not inevitable, nor did it evolve solely out of the hybridization of the upper and lower cultural poles of the day. For instance, it owed much to the "Diary Craze" of the 1880s and 90s, when an unprecedented number of diaries were published for public consumption. "[E]verybody who is anybody is publishing reminiscences, diaries, notes, autobiographies, and recollections" (qtd in Glinert xxv), declared the editor of *Punch* in 1892, a popular observation confirmed by critic Richard Meyer in 1898, who, in an article on diary genre, testified to the "vast quantities of intimate records in print" (Martens 185).[6] Martens claims that the "Diary Craze" was significant in terms of encouraging awareness of the diary as a form for fiction. The fact that "these intimate journals were published as diaries rather than as extracts, thoughts, testimonials, or sources of historical or biographical information," she claims, meant that "[s]omething like a consciousness of a diary as a genre had come into being" (116).

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[6] References to diary publication also abound in the fiction of the period. A familiar late Victorian text, Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, provides testimony to the ubiquity of the diary in late Victorian publishing culture: while Gwendolyn declares that she never travelled without her diary because "one should always have something sensational to read in the train," Cecily defines a diary as "simply a very young girl's record of her own thoughts and impressions, and consequently meant for publication" (Act 2 Scene 2).

Another significant catalyst to the development of modern domestic diary fiction was a growing contemporary interest in personality. [7] As Martens notes, the diary, as "the place for describing, investigating, and expressing [the author's] sel[f]," has always been a document ripe for psychological interest (117). Certainly we see an increase in diary-writing practices at every social stratum in the period, Martens maintains: "Secret diary keeping became an encouraged adolescent exercise; a confirmation candidate could expect to receive a blank volume so labelled as a present" (185). This democratic turn in diary-keeping may be linked imaginatively to the extension of the franchise, for the form locates a great deal of authority in daily experience, a commodity belonging to nearly everyone. Perhaps it is more useful, however, to link it to the 1870 Forster Education act, which extended the franchise of reading and writing and thus allowed the authority of experience some means of expression and transmission. Whatever the case, the diary as a literary genre has been seen as a peculiarly democratic form—in the words of Leon Trotsky, the diary is a genre that "leaves one free from any literary requirements or prescriptions" (qtd in Martens 185-6). Unlike a highly learned form such as the epic, the diary offers itself to the lowest literary common denominator: "lacking rules that restrict its style, topics, and length, the literary diary is a form that requires a minimum of conformity and hence allows for a maximum of self-expression" (Martens 185-6). In this sense, the diary novel reinforced the democratic message of the self-help book at the end of the nineteenth century, suggesting that the literature of self-analysis and self-aestheticizing was accessible to everyone.

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[7] More factors than I can enumerate have been involved in the overdetermination of the genre's development. For example, one should not discount the role of parody in transforming the diary into a mode of fiction. The 1890s offered readers several running diary spoofs, including the fictive comedic diaries of "dyspeptic, a pessimist, a duffer, and an M.P" (qtd in Glinert xxv), as well as, famously, the *Diary of a Nobody*.

So while the *fin-de-siecle* discourse of personality-development brought together mystic aestheticism and popular self-cultivation, it is significant to note that this process was expressed in terms of cultivation. Bennett repeatedly calls on horticultural metaphors to explain the middlebrow development of the personality: for example, he exhorts readers to steep themselves in artistic how-to guides such as Mr. Krehbiel's "How to Listen to Music," Mr. Clermont Witt's "How to Look at Pictures," and Mr. Russell Sturgis's "How to Judge Architecture" (59-60) which he claims as guaranteed to "yield magnificent results to *cultivators*" in the age of the modern Promenade Concert and public art museum (emphasis mine 57-8).[8] Furthermore, he reminds the reader that "disciplining the brain," like gardening, takes continuous care and maintenance: "It is astonishing how you can weed every inch of a garden path and keep it in the most meticulous order, and then one morning find in the very middle of it a lusty, full-grown plant whose roots are positively mortised in granite! All gardeners are familiar with such discoveries" (92).

The frequency with which the garden crops up in early middlebrow literature—as well as its resiliency in doing so—is remarkable, though perhaps it should not be so surprising. After all, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* is a domestic diary, and I have previously discussed the imbrication of garden and home in the suburban imaginary; however, the garden is a particularly significant trope within the middlebrow economy for reasons which I relate below.

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[8] Bennett refers here to Henry Edward Krehbiel's *How to Listen to Music* (1897), Robert Clermont Witt's *How to Look at Pictures* (1902), and Russell Sturgis's *The Appreciation of Architecture: How to Judge Architecture* (1903). The Promenade Concerts were established by Robert Newman in August 1895 to make music more accessible to the public. The decades following the Great Exhibition of 1851 witnessed the growth of a public museum movement that included the establishment of the South Kensington Museum (now the Victorian and Albert Museum) in 1857.

The *fin-de-siècle* suburban garden was a privileged site for middlebrow sensibilities because it offered such a rich metaphoric register for exploring the process of cultivation, a process which has been demonstrated to be significant to the middlebrow's portfolio of cultural investments. A narrative that chronicles the daily struggles and triumphs of the garden, the domestic diary simultaneously chronicles the progress of the cultivating—and self-cultivating—subject. The status of the garden as a preserve for the display of the cultivated artist of living was axiomatic: garden journalist Mrs. Loftie reminds readers that "no garden can be at all satisfactory without the nameless charm that only can be given by the superintendence of a person of taste and cultivation" (215). If there is any truth manifestly taught in the contemporary gardening guides of the period, however, it is that gardening is a learned art. It is bred, not born. Such literature assured that this taste and cultivation was accessible to any reader: "Let no one be discouraged by how much there is to learn," writes Gertrude Jekyll in her introduction to *Wood and Garden* (1899): "Looking back on nearly thirty years of gardening (the earliest part of it in groping ignorance with scant means of help), I can remember no part of it that was not full of pleasure and encouragement" (20). Jekyll is not alone in this advice. Self-help columns and manuals for suburban gardeners often focused on the importance of patient self-regulation throughout the process of cultivation, an assumption so commonplace within suburban cultural logic that it is sent up in *Diary of a Nobody*, in which Thomas and Weedon Grossmith have their hero, Pooter, try to hurry the process of cultivation along: on April 9th, he notes in his diary that he has planted the vegetable seeds, which he proceeds to check for growth on April 11th, 12th, and 13th, to great disappointment.

As previously mentioned, *Elizabeth and her German Garden* initially sold under the mistaken auspices of a gardening manual. Most reviewers recognized, however, that the gardening narrative within *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* could be read on more than one level. For instance, the *Birmingham Post* advised unwitting readers of *Elizabeth*'s multivalence:

> It is said that an honest agriculturalist, whose invocations were mainly pastoral, attracted by the title, bought Mr Ruskin's "Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds," and was greatly bewildered by what he read. We do not say that those who take up this volume in natural expectation of finding an informal treatise on horticulture, will meet a similar experience, for the garden is real, and there is a fair amount about flowers and the amateur's difficulties, the glowing hopes, the gray and sombre fulfilment; but the garden is secondary and the interest aroused is chiefly human. . . (29 Nov. 1898)

The *Preston Guardian*'s reviewer made the link between the garden and the reading subject even more explicit:

> The name of the volume fascinated me in the announcement—that "and her garden" means so much. I don't believe this volume will be heartily enjoyed by anyone who doesn't love a garden with all their heart and soul—yes, soul; for in a garden the soul realises again its birthright. . . (15 Oct. 1898)

Significantly, such a review rendered the relationship of reader and garden in semi-religious terms, reflecting the degree to which both the book, and its readers, invested in a Paterian-inflected aestheticism. Indeed, it was a link made more explicit by "Elizabeth" herself: she embraces a gospel of gardening beauty, claiming that a garden "teach[es] . .

the beauty and the happiness of holiness," a faith she contrasts with the "sad gray" convictions offered by "dingy streets and houses" (120). "The garden is the place I go to for refuge and shelter," she explains, "[for] it is there that I am sorry for the unkindness in me, for those selfish thoughts that are so much worse than they feel, it is there that all my sins and silliness are forgiven" (33). Even *Gardening Illustrated* entered wholeheartedly into the spirit of aesthetic holiness found in the pages of *Elizabeth*:

> But in order to enjoy the charm and delight of Elizabeth's German Garden we must read the brightly written pages of her diary, and 'sincerely trust that the benediction that is always awaiting us in our gardens' may by degrees be more deserved, and that we may grow 'in grace and patience and cheerfulness, just like the happy flowers we so much love'. (21 Jan. 1899)

Although Elizabeth's narrative is spotted with such aesthetic reverie, she just as frequently elaborates a logic of utilitarian self-cultivation. Though she is, at times, impatient with the process of cultivation, she affirms the tenets of her self-help faith, even in the book's sequel, *The Solitary Summer*: "I am under the impression that I am an ordinarily intelligent person, and that if an ordinarily intelligent person devotes his whole time to studying a subject he loves, success is probable" (13). The *Liverpool Post* was particularly invested in the drama of self-cultivation as a process in the novel:

> The book tells how she set about turning the garden into a paradise, of the happiness the work and the anticipation afforded her, of her struggles and failures (with which all who love a garden will sympathise), of the humblings which dogged the overconfident or too aspiring beginner, of how much was learned by making mistakes, and so on, and all in such engaging and informing style as

enables the reader to share largely in her pleasure and profit by her experiences. (23 Nov. 1898)

If the garden trope served as a vehicle for middlebrow concerns with cultivation, it accommodated and expressed both aestheticist and utilitarian discourses of the period. However, Radway elaborates another aspect of the lower, utilitarian discourse of the book exploited by the middlebrow: escapism. While the suburb provided the middleclasses with an escape from the modern city, and the suburban garden provided them with an escape from the modern home, the suburban gardening book provided readers with an escape from what many commentators found to be the ills of modern literature. One should not underestimate, for example, the degree to which even reading about gardens, was, itself, therapeutic and escapist. As a review of E. T. Cook's *Century Book of Gardening* proclaimed "You cannot dip into any corner of it [the book] without forgetting the din and dust of the great city, and flying in your mind's eye to the quiet countryside" (*Country Life Illustrated* 767). Similarly, in a *Daily Graphic* review entitled "A Pleasant Oasis," *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* comes in for praise: "It is refreshing to meet with so wholesome and sunny a piece of work as 'Elizabeth and Her German Garden.' The atmosphere of the book is as sweet and bracing as the air of [. . .] pine forests" (19 Nov. 1898). A review in *World* (17 May 1899) went much further, however, touting *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and its sequel as refreshing alternatives to the current avant-garde books on the market, as well as the "modern" pace and decay of life represented within them:

> The books which we have been called on to admire of late have been, with the exception of *Mr. Dooley*, by no means cheerful. They have been morbid, malarial,

> pessimistic; dealing with drunkenness, degeneration, hereditary diseases—things that are real enough, but not pleasant to think upon in the sweet spring-time. Here comes a book which we have just picked up: it leads you, as it were, from a lazar-house into a garden [. . .]. For 'Elizabeth' who wrote of her German garden, has written some more about her flowers, her books, and her soul, and *The Solitary Summer* (Macmillan) is the result. It is a book read lying somewhere under the trees, "with none to supervise." Yet rather, perhaps, a book to be read in the midst of the chatter and turmoil of a London season, when one engagement treads upon the heels of another. The contrast between the perfect peace of the book and your own anxiety not to miss your next engagement would be rather piquant. To most people who live in the racket of society—and have a brain that insists upon thinking—there comes the suspicion now and again that they are not getting the most out of life, that they are putting too much money into the slot and extracting inadequate sweets; in short, that the game is not worth the candle. And sometimes amid the clack of tongues and the pop of corks, and the clink of glass and the plunk-plunk of the newest band, you will hear a woman saying that she is bored with it all, and would like to go away and grow roses [. . .]. Elizabeth—the familiarity is merely our respect to the pseudonym of an Englishwoman married to a German—Elizabeth meant it, went away, and . . . was thoroughly happy. That is the note of the book. Happiness from beginning to end.

Reviewers were quick to point out that the escapism offered by *Elizabeth* was distinctly different from the lower end of escapist reading as well. The *Cheshire County News* claimed, "[t]here is an old-world charm" about *Elizabeth*. It is the traditional nature of

the book—the fact that the narrative is "entered in the diary as pen and ink sketches supposed to have been drawn among the wildflowers"—that distinguishes it as "a pleasing diversion from the stereotyped modern style of romance" (26 Nov. 1898). Thus *Elizabeth* again stands testimony to the middlebrow values of the *fin de siècle*, highlighting the degree to which readers confirmed middlebrow values by making aesthetic choices which were distinctly new, and yet committed to conserving the traditions of the past.

Just because the generic materials for the genre were available and the mood for its reception amenable does not mean that the development of the domestic diary novel was inevitable at the end of the nineteenth century, nor for that matter that it was even immediately recognized as a distinct form when it did appear in novels such as *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. The reviewer for the *Newcastle Daily Leader*, for example, seemed genuinely bemused by the form of *Elizabeth*:

> This delightful book . . . has nothing but its simple style and flashes of quiet humour to recommend it to the reader. There are no pictures, there are no names. There is not even a plot. Elizabeth hidden away in an old gabled stone house, surrounded by her large garden, has written down her thoughts and doings in a haphazard sort of way, just as time permitted and inclination prompted her, but not one dull page is there in the whole book. (27 Dec. 1898)

Though we opened this chapter with a review associating it with a number of contemporary works, *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* seems to have been fairly early on the generic scene, then, entering the market in the first moments of the modern domestic diary novel's existence. It was not just any market, however, that *Elizabeth and*

Her German Garden was entering. By the *fin de siècle*, a middlebrow cultural formation was already beginning to shape the modern marketplace with practices that are still familiar to us at the beginning of the twenty-first century. An exploration of von Arnim's role in shaping these marketing practices is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Five
Elizabeth and Her Market Garden: Brand, Celebrity and Strategies of Middlebrow Marketing at the *Fin de Siècle*

If a book is worth reading, it is worth buying.
-John Ruskin[1]

When Elizabeth von Arnim wrote to Frederick MacMillan on 5 August, 1934 to declare her intention to cease publishing with MacMillan and Company, the rationale she offered was strictly a financial one:

> I feel that my last book, "Father," was not perhaps handled by your firm as remuneratively as it might have been. You yourself, I think I remember, were away when it came out, which no doubt accounts for the impression I felt of indifference to its fate. There was nothing in the book to prevent popularity, for in fact it was very popular in America, where it was chosen as the Book of the Month.

MacMillan responded with alacrity in order to retain Elizabeth, one of the firm's longest standing authors, but what interests me more about Elizabeth's letter is her unapologetic concern with the marketing of her books.[2] In contrast with a high modernist mythologization of aesthetics as impervious to the demands of the marketplace, von Arnim's letter strikes a distinctly different note, gauging literary success by financial remuneration as much as by critical accolade, by marketing strategy as much as by

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[1] Quoted in Harold Rabinowitz and Rob Kaplan's *A Passion for Books*, p. 204.

[2] Macmillan defended his firm's marketing scheme for *Father*, noting by hand on von Arnim's letter that review copies had been circulated to prominent reviewers and booksellers "in every part of the British empire". Additionally, the title appeared in the "ordinary lists of new books appearing in the principal papers" with "a special scheme for 'display' announcements in the leader Sunday papers" and innovative "portrait show boards," which he described as "a valuable assistant to the bookseller. . . shown in the principal shops throughout the country".

intrinsic literary merit.[3] In fact, far from guaranteeing a book's success, a book's content, in von Arnim's formulation, figures only in negative terms: that is, it may or may not "prevent popularity". Von Arnim's approach to literary production, particularly as showcased in the passage above, is a middlebrow one; that is, it is economically-implicated, identifying literature as an economic, as well as an aesthetic, practice. One has only to recall Virginia Woolf's criticism of the middlebrow as tending to mix art "rather nastily, with money, fame, power, or prestige" (15) to establish the fact that market-mindedness was one of the middlebrow's distinguishing characteristic. In case there was any doubt that Elizabeth von Arnim's literary approach is characteristically middlebrow, I offer the evidence of her association with the Book of the Month Club, an American publishing initiative described by Janice Radway as the "quintessential exemplar" of middlebrow culture. As I mentioned in the introduction, a large sector of the middleclass readership required an efficient cultural delivery mechanism. The Club was (and still is!) one such mechanism, and as such is a compelling instance of the middlebrow in its instititutionalized expression, demonstrating middlebrow hybridity in its "insistent[] appli[cation] to the business of book production and distribution, marketing principles and advertising practices generally associated with other industries" (128). Having had her novel chosen as a Book-of-the-Month Club selection certainly implicates Elizabeth in the nexus of interwar middlebrow marketing according to

[3] Historians of high modernism have for some time been aware of the gaps in this mythology and argued that modernism did, in fact, participate in a commodity culture of a highly specific kind. Lawrence Rainey argues in *Institutions of Modernism* (1998) that, though "modernism is commonly considered 'a strategy whereby the work of art resists commodification, holds out by the skin of its teeth' against the loss of aesthetic autonomy," the opposite may, in fact, be true. He suggests that "modernism, among other things, is a strategy whereby the work of art invites and solicits its commodification, but does so in such a way that it becomes a commodity of a special sort, one that is temporarily exempt from the exigencies of immediate consumption prevalent within the larger cultural economy, and instead is integrated into a different economic circuit of patronage, collecting, speculation, and investment" (3).

Radway's formulation. However, I would argue that her association with the Book of the Month Club complicates Radway's model, for von Arnim's concern with the marketing of her literary wares was not an interwar development, but was evident as early as 1898, when she sent Macmillan her first literary effort in manuscript.[4]

Like many powerful exemplary models, the Book of the Month Club in Radway's study is often in danger of eclipsing the very phenomenon—middlebrow marketing—it is meant to represent. At the very least it is, at times, in danger of oversimplifying the middlebrow, reducing to a single institution what must rightly be seen as a complex cultural field. While I agree with Radway's assertion that the Book of the Month Club was "intimately bound up with the creation of a new cultural constellation" (152), I cannot accept her presentation of the Club and the middlebrow as mutually constitutive and chronologically interdependent, evident in assertions like "the Club marked the appearance of a disturbing new nebula, the middlebrow" (152). Such manipulation of an exemplar threatens to yield a picture of the middlebrow as a closed set of discrete institutions rather than a cultural discourse produced by various agents and institutions, and, in turn, productive of meaning. Furthermore, such a model tends to diminish the historical scope of the middlebrow, denying its evolution as a cultural field over a time period that began several decades before Scherman's 1926 establishment of the Book of the Month Club.[5] In asserting the necessity of seeking a wider chronology for the study

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[4] As her letters to Macmillan and Company attest below, von Arnim saw production and marketing details as deserving of authorial attention.

[5] In Radway's defense, she does inform the reader that literary and cultural production had been undergoing significant reorganization since the end of the nineteenth century, a reorganization that she treats briefly in her book. Furthermore, she admits that her choice to foreshorten book history in this brief treatment may create in readers a misconception that the middlebrow commodification of the book was "foreordained, inevitable, and easily explicable," a perception that she attempts to correct by stressing the fact that a "host of economic, social, institutional, and cultural factors had to come together over a relatively long period of time" (129). Radway is completely justified in her institutional focus because her study is declaredly a

of middlebrow marketing than the one Radway provides, we would do well to remember the exact wording of Silverman's account of the club's conception: the Club was founded, Silverman claims, on the premise that "there would always be a gulf between. . . [h]igh culture and popular culture" but that "sometimes the two merged" and that "a bridge *existed* between them"(211 emphasis mine). According to Scherman then, when Harry Scherman founded the Book Club, a middlebrow bridge between high and low *already existed* and was in fact a pre-condition of the Book Club's establishment. Too often, in Radway's account, Harry Scherman is credited with having a built a bridge over a previously uncrossed cultural gap. When Radway claims that "by 1926, a series of relatively light material and social linkages between particular kinds of writing practises, production methods, the book and readers had congealed into ideological habit, producing two quite distinct ways of conceptualizing the book" (129), the assumption latent in this claim is that these two conceptualizations had never appreciably been brought together or bridged before the Book of the Month Club, a fact which the history of the *fin-de-siecle* book market denies. Scherman was not unprecedented in his adaptation of "familiar and seemingly innocuous marketing strategies" to book distribution (128). Before him, a host of book marketers, authors, and readers had been involved in the cultural experiment of the middlebrow, initiating a range of attempts to realize similar principles and aims through a variety of strategies. Elizabeth von Arnim was one of them.

In Radway's defence, the monolithic status of the Book of the Month Club in middlebrow studies may be more the effect of the seminal status of Radway's study

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study of the Book-of-the-Month Club rather than of middlebrow culture; however, her analysis does at times seems to endow the institution with a seminal status that it does not always merit.

in the field rather than any inherent line of argumentation. The effect, however, is real, eclipsing other expressions of the same cultural spirit. To my mind, the greatest value of Radway's book to middlebrow studies lies not in its close reading of the Book of the Month Club itself (though that is valuable) but in the degree to which it gives us trajectories for study and gestures to the middlebrow values and marketing principles underlying middlebrow cultural formation. What is required are more scholars who will follow the lead of Radway, offering close historical readings of middlebrow engagements at different times and places to increase our understanding of the middlebrow as a field. The historical record of the *fin de siècle* and the beginning of the twentieth century reveals a range of ingenious middlebrow solutions to the "problem" of modern cultural production, distribution, and consumption, of which the Book-of-the-Month Club was just one.[6] A study of middlebrow marketing before 1926 enriches our sense of the middlebrow: more than a discrete set of institutions or a particular technology of book distribution, the middlebrow is revealed to be a cultural marketing discourse, a web of marketing and cultural principles interpreted by various agents under various historical and geographical conditions.

Examining Elizabeth von Arnim's middlebrow marketing practises and investments is the aim of this chapter. Elizabeth's work offers us key insights into the workings of a nascent middlebrow marketing culture, laying the groundwork for the middlebrow marketing institutions so familiar in America by the interwar years. The

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[6] For instance, in his article "A Good Time to Start a Book Club," Al Silverman notes the context in which the Book Club was born as one already electric with middlebrow experiments. Silverman lists several middlebrow initiatives of the period, including De Witt and Lila Acheson Wallace's founding of the *Reader's Digest* (1922), Henry Luce and Briton Hadden's founding of *Time* magazine (1923), Henry Seidel Canby's founding and editorship of the *Saturday Review of Literature* (1924), and Harold Ross's creation of *The New Yorker* (1925), all of which occurred before the founding of the Book of the Month Club in 1926 (209). These are just the American initiatives of the period.

scope of Elizabeth's career also allows us insight into how some of the early transformations in *fin-de-siecle* book marketing—to which Radway briefly refers—actually got worked out in the day-to-day transactions of writers, publishers, and readers at the end of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, Elizabeth's career reveals an important aspect of middlebrow marketing that Radway misses in her focused reading of the Book of the Month Club: the phenomenon of literary celebrity.[7]

Finally, a study of the Elizabeth von Arnim's engagement with the *fin-de-siècle* literary market contributes much to our understanding of how literary aesthetics and market forces shaped each other in a productive as well as a problematic transaction. The pervasive vestiges of a high modern aesthetic continue to represent market concerns as demeaning to art, its legacy present even in the very little extant critical attention given to von Arnim's work. For example, in an introduction to von Arnim's work in *Women Writers of the 1930s*, Alison Hennigan conjectures that "[a] hostile critic might claim that Elizabeth had too keen a sense of literary fashion and the marketplace for her own artistic good," the implication being that Hennigan will somehow "redeem" von Arnim's market engagement. However, she appears to offer a considerable amount of ballast to the hostile critic, asserting that, while *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* "cashed in on a very nineties vogue for a sophisticated reworking of worldly pastoral," von Arnim's slightly later novel, *The Benefactress* (1901) "exploits. . .the turn-of-the-century taste for feminist utopias" and her still later novel, *The Caravaners* (1909), "makes cheap capital of the anti-German sentiment intensifying in [the] years immediately preceding the outbreak of war in 1914" (101). Though Hennigan appears to want to defend von Arnim

[7] While a few scholars—Annette Federico, Richard Salmon and Jonathan Freedman to name a few—have treated this subject as a growing phenomenon at the turn of the century, its history from the Edwardian period on tends largely to be eclipsed by the quixotic "personalities" of high modernism.

from these charges of gross financial interest, she does very little to exonerate her and, in fact, offers plenty of evidence for the reader to draw a similar conclusion. With apologists like this, who needs critics? In fact, I would argue that such pejorative representations of von Arnim's engagement with the contemporary book market reflect a failure on the literary historian's part to take literature of the past on its own terms and to appreciate the legitimate, if forgotten, aesthetic that shaped it.[8] At the very least, a study of von Arnim's market engagements will reveal that she was not a freakishly mercenary profit-monger, but was a participant in a legitimate cultural and aesthetic formation founded on practices and principles of what I will call cultural entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the case of von Arnim helps us to appreciate the historical and formal scope of the middlebrow as an evolving cultural field, by revealing a sampling of its marketing strategies and investments at the *fin de siècle*.

Premises and Principles of the Middlebrow Marketing Mentality

I want to begin this discussion of Elizabeth von Arnim's engagement with and contributions to *fin-de-siècle* middlebrow book marketing by reviewing the characteristics that Radway has identified with middlebrow marketing, in order to establish the kinds of marketing attitudes, preoccupations, and strategies that the historian of middlebrow culture might detect in the *fin-de-siècle* literary field. Radway focuses on the Book of the Month Club as a technology of cultural entrepreneurship, born as a solution to the commonplace problem of modern marketing in many fields: the problem of "facilitating ever-faster circulation of goods [. . .] and ultimately capital itself" (155). Thus the challenge at the heart of middlebrow marketing was one of how to increase the consumption of the book as commodity while preserving its cultural integrity and status.

[8] I owe much on this point to Margaret Cohen's work in *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (2002).

Three major marketing priorities are central to Radway's discussion of the Book of the Month Club's founding and functioning and are significant, I will argue, to the logic of middlebrow marketing in general: accessibility, fungibility, and perceived necessity. All three priorities were key influences on the shaping of the Book of the Month Club's most important marketing technology: its brand. I want to detail these priorities before going on to examine von Arnim's marketing style for signs of the same middlebrow marketing logic at work in the *fin-de-siecle* book market.

An increase in accessibility to books had, to some degree, already been achieved by a late nineteenth-century revolution in book production that reduced book prices such that a large sector now fell within the range of middle-class buying power. Scherman wanted to take accessibility a step further, through bypassing the bookseller and introducing books directly to consumers' homes through the practice pioneered by the popular periodical press: mail-based sales. The challenge of fungibility arose within the marketing field because, as Radway points out, entrepreneurs could not maximize profits with a finite set of products: they aimed at "not only widespread but repetitive sales" (132). Scherman had managed, through direct sales, to find a "permanent channel of communications. . . between [booksellers] and book buyers," but he found that profits could only be maximized when consumers repeatedly accessed the channel; thus the conduit "had to (be kept) endlessly filled with a predictable supply of stories likely to interest consumers of previous titles" (132). To engage repeat sales, Scherman again looked to the popular publishing sector and its investment in the periodical form, focusing on the period of a month as the most likely chronological unit upon which to base his regulatory scheme of distribution. The scheme—a book a month—guaranteed

sales on a repetitive and regular basis, and became one the club's distinguishing features. The choice of a chronologically-based regulatory scheme is significant, as I have previously noted the significance of chronological models and forms within the economy of self-cultivation associated with middlebrow cultural logic.

Scherman recognized that his monthly distribution scheme would only be successful when consumers perceived the necessity of the book as a commodity. He turned to the marketing logic of a pioneering advertising industry which had generated sales success by deflecting consumers' attention from the commodity itself to the experience and benefits resulting from consumption; in short, Scherman advertised "what the object in question could enable consumers to do, to feel, and to be" (Radway 167). The Book of the Month Club harnessed this logic within the book market by emphasising "how certain kinds of books could promote certain reading experiences" and fulfil specific needs for the consumer:

> He needed to imagine why people read and what they read for, and then he needed to consider what factors influenced potential readers to buy books. What he demanded from his writers, finally, was a book deliberately designed for circulation, a book calculated to please its buyers, to yield to their desires, and to answer to their needs—a book readers could use. (Radway 135-6)

Scherman knew that to market books as a necessity, he and his club would need to tap into some of his target consumers' deepest psychological fears and desires. He did so by promoting books as instruments for fulfilling three distinct reader needs: social mobility, emotions management, and self-fashioning.

In terms of catering to reader's desires for social mobility, the club targeted readers of or aspiring to an upper middle-class professional status by highlighting the ability of books to confer social status on their owners through the accretion of cultural value around books as instruments of learning and elite education (Radway 170). In fact, because consumers began to associate "the social prestige of learning with the particular technology for producing that learning in the first place" the purchaser of the book need not even read the purchased book to realize its social potential (Radway 170). Thus economic consumption of the book became interchangeable with readerly consumption of its content within the logic of the Book of the Month Club, which benefited from promoting the sense that buying and reading were, in reality, two aspects of the same cultural transaction.

In addition to the promise it held as a vehicle for social mobility, the book was also promoted by the Book of the Month Club as a mechanism by which readers could fashion themselves as modern subjects. I have already mentioned in a previous chapter the modern movement away from strictly self-help literature toward a range of cultural discourses intent on developing the consumer's personality. It is probably no coincidence that the modern industry of advertising began to develop at roughly the same time as this cult of acquired personality, both owing a great deal to contemporary fascination with developments in psychology both at home and abroad. The modern advertising industry increasingly invested in this cult of personality as it became aware of the profits to be realized when consumers perceived a causal link between consumption and personality development. Advertising became, quite simply, the "science" of showing consumers how their consumption choices could help them discover and express their own

individual and unique subjectivity. The Book of the Month Club certainly made its contribution to the development of this "science": Radway notes that Scherman must particularly be credited with having constructed the concept of the efficient and successful consuming-subject as particularly a *reading* subject. He encouraged readers "to combine, in *bricoleur* fashion, an original literary taste with other individualized preferences for clothes, objects, food, and even opinions as a way of constructing the self" (182). For further evidence of the middlebrow turn towards self-fashioning through books, I turn our attention back to Nicola Humble, who has noted, in her study of middlebrow novels, the frequency with which such narratives included catalogues of the protagonist's books, encouraging the reader "to read character" through the books the protagonist consumes. She indicates that the books listed are generally seen to "range widely," "encompassing many genres of literature, and combining high and lowbrow interests in a daring disregard for conventional judgements" (8). Furthermore, middlebrow narratives frequently included discussion of the characters' favourite books or authors, and involved characters imagining themselves into the plots of their favourite novels (9). Clearly we have, in the Club's development of the consuming middlebrow reader, an example of middlebrow cultural entrepreneurship working at a most efficient level, the Club's modern marketing logic being reinforced through the very narratives of the books it sold. For if consuming books was demonstrated as the key to character development within middlebrow narratives, it could not have been a big step for readers of these narratives to have noted the character-developing application in their own lives. As life and fiction became interimplicated within a middlebrow cultural discourse,

consuming books quickly came to be recognized as an important technology of self-cultivation.[9]

If the book was promoted as a vehicle for social pedagogy and modern self-fashioning within the Book of the Month Club's marketing logic, it was also the source of sentimental education, the importance of which was growing in a period of unprecedented alienation and anonymity. Faced with a modern world characterized by "speed, fragmentation, and chaos," the Book of the Month Club's selection committee sought "a literature adequate to the discontinuities and disorientation of the modern age" (Radway 177). The middlebrow literature discussed in previous chapters certainly fit the bill for, though a modernist *avant garde* defined itself against sentimental and domestic culture, writers of middlebrow fiction found a place for it and, in fact, made it a priority, borrowing from popular literature the concept of reading for escape and comfort in the form of predictable formulas and adherence to traditional literary conventions. Moreover they also borrowed popular literature's aesthetic of utility; that is, they embraced the tendency within a popular literary tradition of using literature for the purpose of instruction and utility. It just so happens that the practical purpose to which Scherman intended the middlebrow book to be put was the management of emotions, a function that Scherman felt would become increasingly important in a period of constant flux, growing internationalism, and impersonal Fordism (185). The Book of the Month Club provided readers not only with the comfort of familiar characters and settings in

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[9] Humble believes that women's reading, in particular, was scrutinized as indicative of middlebrow taste. She notes,

> Questions of what women read, and why, and what ways they do so became a major preoccupation in this period. Critics, intellectuals, writers, librarians, publishers, and sociologists interrogated female reading habits as if they held the key to the significant change in cultural values that were becoming increasingly apparent (9).

middlebrow fiction, but it also promoted readers' sense that books as physical objects could themselves provide a measure of modern solace. In this sense, the Book of the Month Club indirectly entered the sphere of middlebrow domestic culture under discussion in previous chapters, for Radway notes that the Club was deeply invested in representing books as absolutely necessary mechanisms by which to transform a house into a home, positioned as they were "in explicit opposition to the rootless anonymity and lack of individuality in modern life" (149).[10] In the logic of middlebrow marketing, books were a necessity of modern living, offering individuals the means to manage their emotions, build social capital, and cultivate their ideal selves.

Having mentioned the many ways that Radway sees the middlebrow targeting customers, at this point I should mention the modern marketing concept that efficiently handled the challenges of accessibility, fungibility, and perceived necessity and came to represent the heart of Scherman's middlebrow marketing logic: branding.

The Logic of Branding

Scherman clearly had the astuteness to appreciate and exploit one of modern marketing's greatest innovations, the brand.[11] Considering how central a concept it was to both Scherman's success and the middlebrow marketing mindset in general, Radway spends surprisingly little time exploring it. As a result, I would argue, she bypasses a

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[10] Radway points as an example of this middlebrow logic to a 1925 *Good Housekeeping* article by Jane Guthrie, in which the author makes suggestions about "what sorts of books as objects might best be placed in different rooms of the house"; she could do so, Radway explains, because books were "endowed with a halo of meaning and an attendant effect, and as such they could. . .imbue a home with the sentiment and feeling so needed by modern individuals" (149). The meaningful display of books thus became a way for readers to create "the comfort, intimacy, and individuality of a true home, a home that was made rich with affect, memory, and emotion" (149). Thus books acted as "aids to emotional response and mood construction" (150).

[11] Though it is now commonly known as a technology for building virtual market monopoly for corporations like *Kodak*, *Pears* and *Coca-Cola*, such a marketing sense of the term "brand" is a relatively recent one, no doubt derived from the practice of indelibly marking or stamping property (esp. livestock) with a hot iron (Sivulka 48).

form of marketing technology that has not only revolutionised twentieth-century advertising, but which has been strongly characteristic of middlebrow marketing technology from its earliest manifestation. The practice of identifying a number of goods or services under one name or trademark, branding effectively works to Taylorize consumers' access to commodities along the lines of assimilation and differentiation: the brand helps consumers make effective and efficient choices by increasing their ability to differentiate one product from another (thereby increasing the consumer's ability to identify a product worth buying again), as well as to assimilate an unlimited range of products into one familiar and reliable category.

Scherman seems to have appreciated branding, not only as a means of easing consumers' choices, but also because, as a concept rather than a product, the brand has the potential for infinite fungibility. As previously discussed, the monthly distribution scheme around which the Book-of-the-Month-Club brand coalesced played to the virtues of calendar time by harnessing the inevitability of time's passage and placing it in the service of middlebrow self-cultivation. But no doubt a part of its success was related to the fact that the brand itself, because predicated on the trope of a month, was likely to attract middlebrow readers already steeped in the time-regulatory tropes present in domestic diary novels such as *Mrs. Miniver*. In this way, the Book of the Month Club not only maximized financial profits for the club and social profit for the reader, but exemplified the brand's striking ability, in sociologist Jane Pavitt's words, "[to] make[] use of already established codes[,] . . . condensing more complex thoughts into short signals that can be read instantly" (Pavitt 36). If the Book-of-the-Month Club brand relied for its success on the logic of time conservation and management, it also promoted

the principles of fungibility inherent in the concept of the series. We have already briefly discussed the concept of the book series with regard to suburban reading practices in a previous chapter, where I noted the popularity of "classics" or reprint series in particular. Scherman knew the social and educative benefits consumers associated with book series of literary "classics", for the very term *classics* recalls the core subjects of an elite Oxbridge liberal arts education. It is important to note, however, that despite its selling power in terms of social pedagogy, the classics series concept posed a problem for Scherman because, as Radway points out, a "distribution system designed to sell only sets of classics was hindered by certain built-in limitations that restricted its expansion and placed a cap on its financial success" (163-4). Scherman solved this problem by re-conceptualizing the books chosen for the club as "*new* classics"—the cultural merit of which had been gauged by a committee of well-known cultural authorities. In this way, the Book of the Month Club sold new books each month by guaranteeing to readers that these books—"the best new books published every month"—were so good they were "sure to *become* classics" (Radway 171).

If the Book-of-the-Month Club brand addressed the perceived need of readers for a vehicle of social pedagogy, it also addressed readers' needs for a sense of belonging and, paradoxically, for a sense of individuality, within a culture increasingly preoccupied with the impersonal. Its name tapped into the connotations of a *club* as an elite space of class social-cohesion and networking predicated on the privilege of membership. Clearly Scherman, in conceiving of the scheme as a club, was attempting to establish what sociologists of consumption have termed "brand relationship," the ability of brand to promote a sense of belonging (Radway 156). Scherman's choice of members for Book of

the Month Club selection committee reflects a concern not just with establishing the Club's literary authority but with providing warmth and relationship in what many consumers felt to be an impersonal marketplace. For any brand, the Book of the Month included, marketing success is predicated on a relationship characterized by authenticity: as Patrick Barwise, Andrea Durham and Mark Ritson assert in their essay, "Ties that Bind: Brands, Consumers, and Businesses," "a brand is a badge of trust" (78). It is no coincidence that Scherman claimed trust as the foundation of his scheme's success. In 1966 he wrote, "If you are to deal with or think about the American people *en masse*, you can trust them as you trust yourself. You can trust their consuming curiosity[,] . . . their fascination with every colourful aspect of history[,] . . . their immediate response to good humour and gaiety, but also to the most serious thought[.] . . . [Y]ou can trust their gracious open-mindedness, forever seeking new light upon their troubled but wonderful world" (qtd in Silverman 211). Thus the Book-of-the-Month Club brand was not just selling books; it was selling a relationship.

The particular relationship that the Book of the Month Club cultivated with and among readers was based, at least in part, in the shared act of reading. Readers depended upon the Club to offer reliable recommendations for reading, recommendations made from one reader to another. In this sense, it was institutionalizing a network of reading recommendation that until this point had only been centralized in book reviews. However, the Book of the Month Club less resembles the book review than it does traditional word-of-mouth and anecdotal recommendations of friends who were readers. Franco Moretti has stressed the significance of reader-relationships in the development of bestselling books over the nineteenth century, and notes that, far from becoming extinct

in the twentieth century, they came into their own with regard to popular film culture. He points to the model posited by economists Arthur De Vancy and W. David Walls for the film industry:

> Film audiences make hits or flops. . . When they see a movie they like, they make a discovery and they tell their friends about it; reviewers do this too. This information is transmitted to other consumers and demand develops dynamically over time as the audience sequentially discovers and reveals it demand. . . A hit is generated by an information cascade. (210)

The twentieth-century film industry was not alone in its dependence on the information cascade; the book market was equally dependent on the development of goodwill and positive buzz through networks of readers. The Book of the Month Club merely institutionalized such an information cascade, efficiently and reliably delivering the opinion of familiar and well-informed readers (the Book of the Month Club selection-committee members) about what consumers would be likely to enjoy and/or appreciate each month.

The Book of the Month Club did not just promote consumers' sense of belonging and relationship, however; it also enabled consumers to construct themselves as socially-distinctive individuals. Jane Pavitt points out that with the advent of a mass market, not only products, but brands came to be used "to individuate ourselves, both in terms of how we see ourselves and how others see us" (156). Brand is thus deeply implicated in the shift of modern subjectivity from "more traditional providers of identity such as family and work, religious and political beliefs" to a consumption-based code of lifestyle, in which the subject is "literally fashioned from commodities and forms of entertainment

and information gathering" (Pavitt 39). Branding offers a much-needed addendum to our discussion in Chapter One about the process by which the social subject seeks to cultivate itself through reading, for branding allows the social subject a new technology of cultivation: consumption. In the case of the Book of the Month Club, book-buying and consumption was promoted as one of the most powerful and efficient vehicles of self-fashioning. The book's potential for moulding subjectivity is evident in Scherman's choice of members for the Book of the Month Club selection committee, who were necessarily cast as exemplary models of cultivated subjectivity. Heywood Broun and Christopher Morley are examples of the literary *bricoleur* Scherman envisaged, people who were, in the words of Radway, "defined for the public not by their mastery and enactment of a unified social code of customs and manners, but by the particular panache with which each displayed his own unique, wholly original taste" (181-2).[12] Thus through the example of its selection committee members, the Book of the Month brand built and reinforced the idea among readers that consumption was, like self-cultivation, an important and accessible vehicle for modern self-management.

The Book of the Month Club is an interwar example that provides us with a profile of middlebrow marketing's central tenets—accessibility, fungibility, and perceived need—as well as the characteristic way in which it responded to those challenges through the development of the brand, providing the cultural entrepreneur not only with repeat access to customers, but with a new, and distinctly modern discourse of

[12] Radway points out, for example, that committee member Heywood Broun was best known to the public as the author of a regular newspaper column entitled "It Seems to Me," a column dedicated to the celebration of an individual who was "characterized not so much by special skill or actions but by the particularlity of the opinionated views he held" (180-1). Like Broun, Christopher Morley was chosen for his personality: described by Silverman as "a buoyant man with wide and varying interests," Morley was, like Broun, a "specifically literary exemplar[] of a new, more modern subject" (181).

books and reading. Books were thus established as vehicles of social pedagogy, emotion management, and self-fashioning within a middlebrow framework. But was such a conception of the book radically new in 1926?

Middlebrow Marketing at the Fin de Siècle

The challenges of accessibility, fungibility, and perceived consumer need facing Harry Scherman in the 1920s were not unprecedented in the literary field. One has only to read Edmund Gosse's complaints in "The Influence of Democracy in Literature" (1893) to detect the literary field's already considerable interest in investigating the principles of cultural entrepreneurship and the logic of a distinctly modern form of book-marketing:

> [a] novel may be utterly silly, be condemned by every canon of taste, be ignored by the press, and yet may enjoy a mysterious success, pass through tens of editions, and start its author on a career which may lead to opulence. It would be interesting to know what it is that attracts the masses to books of this kind. How do they hear of them in the first instance? Why does one vapid lady-like novel speed on its way, while eleven others, apparently just like unto it, sink and disappear? How is the public appetite for this insipidity to be reconciled with the partiality of the same readers for stories by writers of real excellence? Why do those who have once pleased the public continue to please it, whatever lapses into carelessness and levity they permit themselves? I have put these questions over and over again to those whose business it is to observe and take advantage of fluctuations in the book-market, but they give no intelligible reply. (62)

Perhaps it is not surprising that even "those whose business it is to observe" the book market were having difficulty keeping track of its logic, for the market was undergoing vast transformations. As previously noted, the book as commodity was only really becoming accessible to a mass market for the first time at the end of the nineteenth century, due in great part to factors such as the collapse of the three-decker novel, a fall in production prices, and the publication of new and old fiction in cheap formats (Eliot 41). What is clear, however, is that publishers were coming to appreciate the challenge of fungibility by the turn of the century. They met that challenge through the device of the book series, which involved the production of uniformly-bound and priced books in a manner similar to the mass-production of packaged goods being sold in other industries. The book series was not just a precondition for interwar middlebrow marketing; its proliferation in the 1880s and 90s—consider, for example, the emergence of *Cornhill Library of Fiction*, Redway's *Shilling Series*, and Oxford University Press's *World Classics* to name just a few (Howsam 5)—suggests that it was central to a *fin-de-siecle* middlebrow cultural formation. Reprint series were so popular that, by the time that J. M. Dent's *Everyman* series was introduced in 1906, the *Times Literary Supplement* complained of series that "their fecundity is beginning to beggar the modesty of nature" (qtd in John Turner 27). The marketing appeal of the book series is explained by Richard Altick with reference to the increasingly popular studies of the psychology at the turn of the century: package psychology involved the assumption of a reader's desire to own a complete set of products, while brand name psychology involved the reader's desire to buy a series of books on the strength of one, and snob appeal depended upon the concept of a "library" as an *accoutrement* of upper class life (Howsam 23). Radway

might argue that middlebrow marketing premises required a fungibility not offered by the relatively finite set of products that comprise a "classics" series; however, *fin-de-siecle* publishers were not just publishing classics series. They were initiating series under new and changing rubrics that could expand to fit any number of books as long as they were topical. Furthermore, book historians of the late nineteenth century have noted the degree to which the appeal of the book series was already being targeted at the middleclass consumer, and that its logic is understandable in terms of the impulses and investments of middlebrow culture, especially with regard to social mobility and cultural preservation. John Feather points out, for instance, that though the series format was used to sell books at several social strata, it has been associated most strongly with "the move to the middle, the appeal of the educated middle-class and its upper and lower borderlands" (qtd in Turner 28-9). Similarly, in a late nineteenth-century letter to the head of T. Fisher Unwin, manuscript-reader Will H. Dircks floated the idea of a "society" short-story series with the rationale that "this should appeal to the *nouveau riche* who wished to learn about the manners of 'people in ranks above them'" (qtd in Collin 59).

More important than the development of the series, however, was the transfer of industrial marketing concepts to the book market in the form of branding. Sociologists and historians of consumer culture identify the 1890s as a key period in the development of branding as a practice, for it emerged as an aid for consumers to choose among the mass-produced and uniformly packaged commodities that began to flood markets in the second half of the nineteenth century (Sivulka 47). In fact, one could argue that the concept of branding in the book market predated its industrial employment for a kind of

prototypical branding had been applied in the book industry from at least the mid-eighteenth century in the form of the publisher's imprint. While book publication had previously necessitated that every book bear the various imprints of copyright-holders, printers and booksellers, by the end of the eighteenth century we see the emergence of the modern publishing house and with it, the publisher's imprint as an important means of product-identification.[13] Particularly as publishing houses began to establish reputations and/or diversify their literary wares, the publisher's brand had the power to draw customers and ensure loyalty. In the latter case, the nineteenth-century brand of Macmillan and Company—the publishers of "Elizabeth"—is exemplary of a brand targeted at middlebrow consumers.

Macmillan and Company was established by brothers Daniel and Alexander Macmillan mid-century and its publishing lists seem to have been influenced by the brothers' own experiences with reading, particularly with regard to their early personal commitment to self-improvement through reading the works of P.B. Shelley, Thomas Carlyle, and Alexander Scott (Van Arsdel 178). Though their list initially focused on the publication of edifying non-fiction, they cautiously introduced fiction in 1855 with Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!*, followed by *Tom Brown's School Days* in 1857 (180). The Macmillan and Company brand seems to have begun to coalesce by the end of the 1850s; according to Rosemary T. Van Arsdel, the firm had developed a market-image characterized as "cautious, careful about money, [and interested in] choosing books 'to last'" (180). Thus a significant aspect of the firm's brand identity was the "classic" (as the quintessential "book that lasts"), a category of books which has already been

[13] The Minerva Press was one such firm. Founded in the 1770s, William Lane's firm was so closely associated with cheap novels and romance that it became a by-word for circulating library fiction, and "Minerva" was often used by high-minded contemporaries as "an epithet of contempt" (Blakey 1-2).

mentioned as significant to middlebrow reading practices. Historian Charles Morgan indicates that in terms of their books' content Macmillan and Company gravitated toward "middle of the road material," avoiding "the morally dubious or adventurous" (148).[14] Head of firm Frederic Macmillan was financially savvy in terms of distributing and selling books—it was his initiative, for example, that helped establish the Net Book Agreement of 1899/1900. Furthermore, Macmillan and Company was a great engine for serial publication, including fungible series like the popular *Highways and Byways* series. Leslie Howsam has pointed out in her study of series publication that Macmillan and Company was market leader in this regard, producing some of the largest amounts of series by any Great British publishing house in the period of the 90s.[15] Furthermore, Macmillan and Company became identified with a genre that offered readers another efficient and Taylorized version of the classics—the anthology—through its publication of Frances T. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language* in 1861, the success of which caused the firm to transform the concept into a full-fledged series.[16] Faced with the *Golden Treasury* series, it is hard not to be reminded of the Book-of-the-Month Club initiative, for both claimed to offer the best of culture in an efficient, pre-processed form suited to the self-improving reader. The essentially "middling" or moderate character of Macmillan's at the end of the nineteenth

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[14] It is only fair to point out that while MacMillan himself was ultimately successful in establishing the Net Book Agreement and guaranteeing prices for bookseller, his firm was not always seen to be on the cutting edge of advertising. In fact, the reputation of the MacMillan brand for moderation did not alwayus compensate for its inertia regarding traditional forms of advertisement. Thus H. G. Wells wrote the following letter to Frederic MacMillan: 'I like your firm in many ways. I don't think you advertise well, and I think you're out of touch with the contemporary movement in literature. I don't think you have any idea of what could be done for me. . But on the other hand you are solid and sound and sane" (Morgan 147).

[15] Howsam notes the exponential growth of Macmillan and Company's series publication: while it only published one series between 1835-1862, it was responsible for the publication of forty three in the last three years of the century (7).

[16] They went on to publish some 40 titles in the *Golden Treasury* series by 1889.

century was also the product of the firm CEO Frederic Macmillan's personal philosophy: according to publishing historian Charles Morgan, Macmillan was notoriously "oversuspicious of extremes" (144). It is not surprising that von Arnim chose to send her manuscript to Macmillan and Company, nor that Macmillan's chose her as a new addition to its "family" of writers in the late 1890s, for von Arnim's work reflected the moderate tone of the firm. In his capacity as manuscript reviewer for the firm, Henry James reported upon reading *Elizabeth and her German Garden* that "whatever her limitations, Elizabeth is *not* an extremist" (qtd in Morgan 144). In publishing with Macmillan and Company, Von Arnim enjoyed the benefs of the firm's established brand; however, von Arnim's work was useful to Macmillan, too, both as a moneymaking author and a positive extension of the firm's brand equity.

The publishing imprint is not the only manifestation of brand logic functioning in the late nineteenth-century book market. The author's brand functioned along similar lines and is an extremely important manifestation with regard to von Arnim. Every author's name functions as a brand when it acts as an identifiable selling feature for multiple literary products, recommending them for purchase on the basis of their collective relationship to the consumer's previous experience of works under the same name. The author's name thus functions as more than an identifier of the author; it becomes a commodified product in and of itself. Radway does mention the concept briefly, pointing to the late nineteenth-century production of fiction by contract writers "who wrote books regularly and repetitively to be published under the corporate pen name or author brand," Bertha M. Clay being a case in point (132-3). Though the case cited by Radway involved the initiation and management of brand by a publishing house,

in fact, the author brand seems frequently to have been created and managed by the writer him- or herself, who was then accompanied in these efforts by publisher and literary agent. In fact, it is hard to say for certain who was initially responsible for having developed the author-brand "Elizabeth," because it seems to have developed more as an effect of reception than of production. In referring to "Elizabeth," I am of course referring to the brand that Mary Annette von Arnim created for herself within the book market. Von Arnim had initially intended to publish *Elizabeth and her German Garden* under the pseudonym "Elizabeth Careless," reflecting not only the whimsical character of the protagonist, but also the first-person authorship of a diary narrative. The choice of "Elizabeth" as the author's Christian name, according to Karen Usborne, may have been an act of homage by von Arnim to her literary ancestor by marriage, Bettina von Arnim, a German poet and philosopher active in the German Romantic movement.[17] Von Arnim's rationale for publishing under a pseudonym appears to have been related to her husband's concern that her literary work might compromise his social position in the conservative milieu of the Prussian petty nobility. The timidity of a first-time author may also have influenced von Arnim's choice. Writing to Frederick Macmillan about her manuscript, she asserted, "It is the first thing I have done, and would have to be for private reasons, strictly anonymous" (3 Mar. 1898). However, the likelihood that Count Henning von Arnim's concern was the source of her choice is strengthened by her letter to MacMillan a few weeks later, reminding him to remove her name from the title page of the book proofs and declaring herself "confident that you will carefully keep what must

[17] See Usborne, pp 43-5. The sister of poet Clemens Brentano, Bettina von Arnim was a figure of the German Romantic movement, and was related to Henning by marriage to his grandfather's cousin, Ludwig Achim von Arnim.

be for family reasons a secret!".[18] She was adamant, writing again on 16 July, 1898: "Might I beg you to see that in any advertisements of the book not the least clue to the writer appears?" (11). Von Arnim also seems to have been concerned that the book might reflect badly on the country of her adoption by marriage. Certainly this is the reason for anonymity imputed to "Elizabeth" by reviewers:

> At present the person about whose identity one would be curious, is the author of that very charming and successful book, 'Elizabeth and her German Garden.' Wild horses, it appears, would not drag the secret out of her publisher; and as Elizabeth lives in Germany, and presumably does not wish to invite the attention of her German neighbours, whom she criticises lightheartedly, to the book, she will no doubt remain undiscovered, though not obscure. (*Speaker* 1 Apr. 1899)

At the very least, a fear of attracting attention from her German neighbours seems to have been the basis for her refusal to have *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* translated into German. "I have the very greatest objection to 'Elizabeth' . . .being translated into German," she wrote in a letter to Macmillan dated 18 April 1899, "and beg you to refuse Nils Greeve or anyone else permission to do so. . . [T]he book itself could have no possible interest for the German public and would only be read when people found out who had written it, and then only from ill-natured motives". Though she published anonymously then, von Arnim's books came to be sold under the brand of "Elizabeth," for readers bought books credited to "the author of Elizabeth and her German Garden" and even came to see the merging of the author with the first person narrator herself, "Elizabeth of the German Garden". This merging tendency understandably built brand equity and interest by linking the "Elizabeth" brand with the fully-developed personality

[18] Von Arnim's letter is entered in the register of the Macmillan archive between 5 June and 16 July, 1898.

of the diary's protagonist. As the novel's narrator was already fairly intimately known to readers as "Elizabeth"—"the familiarity is inevitable since the lady only yields up her Christian name" notes the *Westminster Gazette* (25 May 1899)—the "Elizabeth" brand immediately took on a similarly familiar personality and with it, presupposed a brand relationship with the reader. This relationship was reinforced through the consumer "trust" generated by a brand. Such a reinforcement was common within middlebrow fiction because, as stated in the introduction, middlebrow fiction tended to appeal to the reader's senses of authenticity through narratives that were "unashamedly autobiographical," drawing on the "real life experiences of the author" (Bracco 11). In a review of the "Elizabeth" sequel *Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen*, the *Illustrated London News* celebrates the "truthfulness" of "Elizabeth's" story:

> The fiction that masquerades as fact and fails, we know; we likewise know the fact that, with equal audacity and futility, masquerades as fiction; but the judiciously woven texture of plain truth, and that higher and more universal form of verity derived from the imagination, the texture wherein the elements defy analysis, is a rarer stuff, and one to be duly prized when it is discovered. (12 Mar. 1904)

I have already noted the significant appeal of brand personality and brand trust in an age of modernity, with all of its potential alienating and impersonal accompaniments. The "Elizabeth" brand acknowledged such alienation in occasional asides—" I long more and more for a kindred spirit . . . but kindred spirits are so very, very rare; I might almost as well cry for the moon" (*German Garden* 42-3)—but built within its narratives an antidote to this loneliness: the practice of reading. By foregrounding the sociability of reading,

"Elizabeth" constructs the very community for which she expresses the desire in her books. It is significant, for example, that she appears to personify books by referring to them by authorship rather than by title. Furthermore, she frequently finds herself whimsically dialoguing with the author about the narrative of his/her book, as in the following passage from the sequel to *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, *Solitary Summer*:

> 'Oh, my dear Thoreau,' I murmur sometimes, overcome by the fierce heat of the little path at noonday and the persistence of the flies, 'did you have flies at Walden to exasperate you? And what became of your philosophy then?' (*Solitary Summer* 24)

She elaborates on her relationship with the writer:

> He of course does not like me as much as I like him, because I live in a cloud of dust and germs produced by wilful superfluity of furniture, and have not the courage to get the match and set light to it; and everyday he sees the door-mat on which I wipe my shoes on going into the house, in defiance of his having told me that he had once refused the offer of one on the ground that it is best to avoid even the beginnings of evil. But my philosophy has not yet reached the acute stage that will enable me to see a door mat in its true character as the hinderer of the development of souls, and I like to wipe my shoes. (*Solitary Summer* 24)

"Elizabeth" declares the power of the reader: by reading Thoreau's books, she claims, "now his spirit belongs to me, and all he thought, and believed, and felt, and he talks as

much and as intimately to me here in my solitude as ever he did to his dearest friends years ago in Concord" (24).

As Jane Pavitt points out in *Brand.new*, branding relationship is as dependent on reception as on production: "The brand image, or brand value, results from the 'dialogue' that takes place between producer or brand owner and the consumer or user" (21). In most cases we can only infer the existence of the consumer's perception of relationship with the brand through consumption. In the case of "Elizabeth," however, we have hard evidence of the two-way relationship between the brand and its consumers in the form of fan letters deposited in von Arnim's archive. Letters like that of Alice S. Knox suggest the degree to which readers found in "Elizabeth" a kindred spirit:

> Dear Madame Elizabeth,
>
> I must write you a few lines, to thank you for the very great pleasure you have given me in your two books, which I have just read. . . I do not know when I have read anything I enjoyed as much. You have the same love and keen friendship for flowers that I have. . . My 'Man of Wrath' is simply devoted to birds and animals and all things in nature. Our tastes go well together, and our life is consequently a perfect one, especially when we can manage to get away by ourselves, for a solitary time. (5 Sep. 1899)

Similarly, M.F.L. Shepheard confided to Elizabeth,

> Your two books are charming! You are the first person who thoroughly expresses what I feel about flowers, and little nooks and garden life! I could not have put my feelings into words, but you have done it for me. I would like to know you, and your garden, and the Man of Wrath and the babies—we should I think find

much in common. I also am my own head gardener and have made my gardens out of a dreary, stiff unhappy looking peice [sic] of lawn. (19 July 1899)

Having elaborated on the delights of her own garden, she closes her letter to Elizabeth signing herself "your sister in sympathy and flora". A Manchester reader, John Norris, wrote to relate the serendipitous story of how he came to read the "Elizabeth" book: "your book was sent to me," he writes, "as a present from a niece, who married a young German two years ago, and has cast her lot with the Deutches, and is now living in Schonfels by Gwickau, Sinclusen. A somewhat odd coincidence I venture to think!" He goes on to recommend a few stocks for her garden—explaining that "the description of your garden created in my mind such longings that I could not desist obtruding my views or 'airing my opinions'"—and reassures "Elizabeth" of his hope that the relationship will continue in the form of her next book, to which he "look[s] forward. . .with a considerable amount of interest and pleasure". From reader Jeannette L. Gilder, von Arnim received a letter asking her to "[p]ardon this familiarity, but what is one to do!":

> I have wandered with you through your German Garden, spent a Solitary Summer in intimate association with you, and you are Elizabeth to me as much as you are Elizabeth to the Man of Wrath. I cannot resist the temptation to tell you how much I have enjoyed your books, which so far as tastes go, I might have written, but which for style, though a slave to the pen for a quarter of a century, I could not approach. . . I hope you will give us more, and more again.

The "Elizabeth" brand acted not only as the reader's kindred spirit, but as another node on the network of word-of-mouth book and reading recommendations. If "Elizabeth" expresses her own thoughts about reading in the pages of her narratives, her readers are

inspired to do likewise in the letters they write to her: while Jeannette L. Gilder encloses a pamphlet on Walt Whitman on account of "Elizabeth's" expressed admiration for him, V. D. Davis encloses an *Inquirer* article entitled "In a Garden" for her perusal (29 Aug. 1899), and M.F.L. Shepheard recommends "Elizabeth" read a book entitled "Garden Gravity," assuring her "you would love it".

Brand creation and maintenance does not just invoke the soft properties of brand personality and brand relationship, but also includes attention to the meticulous details of production, packaging and presentation. Radway tends to credit this physical aspect of middlebrow book marketing to the proactive publisher rather than the writer:

> In this form of publishing, the motor principle of the system was lodged not in the supposedly autonomous author but, rather, in the new linchpin of the system, the increasingly proactive editor, who was capable of initiating publication ideas and seeing them to fruition. To facilitate the multiple acts of consumption envisioned and necessitated by the system, this new kind of editor found it necessary to think carefully about readers and reading. He needed to imagine why people read and what they read for, and then he needed to consider what factors influenced potential readers to buy books. What he demanded from his writers, finally, was a book deliberately designed for circulation, a book calculated to please its buyers, to yield to their desires, and to answers to their needs—a book readers could use." (135-6)

One should not underestimate, however, the role played by the interested and market-savvy writer in this process of designing the book for circulation. Elizabeth was keenly interested in ensuring that the book's form not only complemented its content but

promoted its sale by presenting a unified and attractive brand image. On March 1, 1898, von Arnim wrote Macmillan with specifications regarding the size, paper, type, and width of margin for "Elizabeth and her German Garden," demonstrating an attention to detail that characterized her interaction with Macmillan and Company throughout the rest of her writing career. Furthermore, von Arnim was concerned that the book-format reflect its content, so she had already asked if Macmillan would publish it in the form of a diary; that is, in place of chapter divisions, she wished the text to be divided by entry, the dates of which would be entered in italics on the left hand side of the page (4 Jan. 1898). It is precisely "Elizabeth's" concern with form that *Punch* targets in a satirical ode to the author in 1901:

> As for form, you must consider what the reading-world expects,
> And epistles are the thistles that the public-ass effects;
> So abolish old-world chapters, and at each new section's head
> You had better write your "Letter Number So-and-so" instead;
> And you'll quite eclipse the fame of many literary men,
> For you're fated to be rated as a man of letters then.
>
> ("The Complete Author" 7 Aug. 1901 100)

Punch may have misidentified the genre of "Elizabeth"'s novel in describing it as an epistolary novel, but even when applied to the diary novel, *Punch*'s argument remains the same: formal playfulness and novelty are factors seen likely to increase a book's saleability.

"Elizabeth" was interested not only in the interior format, but the exterior format of her books as well. On 5 June, 1898, she wrote to Macmillan to request that her book's

cover be "perfectly plain, with nothing at all in the shape of a design, in pale grey green with white lettering, or perhaps "white cloth, and grey green lettering". She apologized for troubling him with "what are possibly unpractical suggestions," but defended her suggestions by explaining "it is naturally a matter of interest to me". Incidentally, its packaging was seen as one of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden's" selling qualities. The *Newcastle Daily Leader* asserted that "[t]he brightness and happiness of Elizabeth in her garden and her home make all that she has to say so charming and real that *this prettily bound* book is sure to be popular" (27 Dec 1898 emphasis mine).

Von Arnim's first book thus set the groundwork for the "Elizabeth" brand on both the levels of content and form. However, the "Elizabeth" brand was extended to sell a variety of products under its auspices. I have noted that once a brand is born, it extends to every product marketed under it; in fact, as Jane Pavitt writes, "[r]ather than brands existing to sell more of a product, products are developed as a means of extending and consolidating the brand" (39). The author-brand functions in the same way, though to explain certain aspects of its functioning it is useful to turn to the work of twentieth-century film historians like Thomas Whiteside and the phenomenon he calls the "blockbuster complex". Whiteside's "blockbuster complex" is defined by commercial media spin-off, which involves the "promotion in one medium feed[ing] the promotion in another to achieve the maximum marketing effect in both" (73). Whiteside's focus remains specifically on twentieth-century media like film and television—he devotes an entire chapter of his book, for example, to the marketing phenomenon of author's T.V. appearances—but his insights are relevant to discussions of how a late nineteenth-century

writer produced, marketed, and extended the franchise of her brand.[19] In an era predating popular film, writers, publishers, and agents looked to other media to extend the profits of a charismatic text. While illustration, for example, offered a similar effect to film by defamiliarizing the text through the visual register, stage adaptations of the book were another way of extending the text's initial profits. While von Arnim did experiment with translating her novels for the stage over the course of her career, the more significant franchise of her initial bestseller was the illustrated edition, which appeared in October 1900.[20] There seems to have been a demand for an illustrated version of the novel, as fan letters included expressions of interest in purchasing an illustrated version should one be produced.[21] Von Arnim's correspondence with Frederic Macmillan suggests that the edition was the initiative of Mr. George Brett, director of Macmillan and Company in America.[22] Whatever the case, the illustrated edition comprehended "twelve

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[19] Certainly the "Elizabeth" franchise received filmic interpretation over the course of the twentieth century. Warner Brothers bought the rights to von Arnim's 1940 novel *Mr. Skeffington* for $50,000 and the film followed, starring Bette Davis and Claude Raines in 1940. Much later in the century, Miramax released a film-adaptation of von Arnim's 1922 novel *Enchanted April* (1986).

[20] Usborne points out that the dramatic rights to *Princess Priscilla's Fortnight* had been bought by playwright Herbert Trench, who intended to produce von Arnim's stage adaptation at the Haymarket Theatre. Because von Arnim seems to have felt inadequate for the task, Trench arranged for her to consult with J.M.Barrie. The play, entitled *Priscilla Runs Away*, was deemed a success when it opened in 1910. Von Arnim appears to have come across an unauthorized stage adaptation of her 1901 novel *The Benefactress* in 1909 (9 Feb 1909). This discovery may or may not have been the motivating factor for her return to the novel in September 1914 to attempt her own adaptation, an attempt that was never realized because of the anti-German climate in England and America during and after WWI (Usborne 198).

[21] For example, Jeannette Gilder wrapped up her letter by expressing "[h]ow delightful it would be to have an edition of the G.G. illustrated from photographs taken on the spot".

[22] On 31 October, 1900, von Arnim wrote the following to Macmillan:

> It is a matter of indifference to me whether there is, or is not, an illustrated edition of the garden books for England. People who are interested will get the American one if there is none in England, so that it's really a question of whether you think the sale[?] would make such an edition worth while bringing out. If you do think so, I have no objection to it, and would only ask that I might have some copies, and suggests that there should be a new cover and that, if possible, the book itself be bigger, so that the pictures do not look too big. Each of the pictures sent to you by Mr. Brett has its own place in the books, a name or quotation beneath, and in some cases, notes. (Macmillan and Company Archive doc 43/44)

photogravure illustrations from photographs," featuring images of "Elizabeth's" home and garden, as well as her three daughters (the April, May, and June babies) and scenes of ethnographic interest (i.e. Russian plough-girls in Pomeranian fields).[23] The use of photograph-based illustrations not only engaged readers with the visual register, but may have reinforced readers' sense of the diary's realism through allusion to discourses of photo-journalism.

The illustrated version of "Elizabeth and Her German Garden" was joined by some twenty novels and a play under the rubric of the "Elizabeth" brand by the end of von Arnim's career in 1940. However familiar the name of "Elizabeth of her German Garden" may have been to readers at different points over her career, I would argue that brand equity was particularly strong in the case of three of her earliest novels—*The Solitary Summer*, *April Baby's Book of Tunes*, and *Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen*—all of which loosely follow the first-person narrative of Elizabeth's life in Germany and thus act as sequels to *Elizabeth and her German Garden*.[24]

The sequel form requires comment here, for along with the book series, the sequel was experiencing a boom at the end of the nineteenth century. Mary Ann Gillies points out in "The Sequel and the Literary Agent" that the unprecedented proliferation of sequels in this period was brought about by the "unique cultural and material conditions of this period," and points particularly to the rise of the literary agent as an important

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[23] Von Arnim does not seem to have been particularly happy with the way in which the American illustrated edition was produced. On 7 November, 1900 she wrote the following to Macmillan:

> Mr. Brett has sent me copies of the illustrated edition of my two garden books. . let me beg you, if you decide to bring out an illustrated edition, to give them a different cover, for everything about the one chosen for America is distasteful to me—stuff, design, colour, and lettering. I believe you will be of my opinion when you see the books.

[24] As von Arnim experimented with new narrative voices, characters, and settings, the brand seems to have been perceived as somewhat diluted, in part because "Elizabeth" appeared only on the front cover of later books, rather than on every page.

catalyst to profit-generation through sequels. Strangely, the proliferation of the sequel has not been discussed with regards to the contemporary innovation of brand, despite the fact that both phenomena involve the manipulation of consumers and extension of profit through sales of multiple products under a single auspice. While the brand functions under the auspices of the originating manufacturer, the sequel functions under the auspices of a charismatic originating text; both, however, cater to consumer taste for repetition with variation. As Paul Budra and Betty A. Schellenberg write in their introduction to *Part-Two: Reflections on the Sequel* , the sequel provides "a sequence of narrative satisfaction that is at once a variation upon, and ultimately comparable to, an audience's first experiences" (9). Similarly, of brand, Patrick Barwise, Andrea Dunham, and Mark Ritson write that brand equity "depend[s] upon trust, familiarity, and difference" (78). The sequel significantly promotes brand relationship then, and provides an antidote to modern alienation by providing readers with the opportunity to return to a familiar fictional space and revisit their relationship with familiar characters, settings, and authorial voice.

Within a year of the book's publication, von Arnim was hard at work on a book which was not only her second novel, but her second "Elizabeth" novel. When she sent Macmillan the manuscript on 4 January 1899, she referred to it as "a continuation of 'Elizabeth and Her German Garden'". Upon receiving Macmillan's offer, von Arnim requested that the continuation "be exactly the same in appearance as Elizabeth and the cover just the same colour" (23 Jan 1899). When it was published in 1899, *Solitary Summer* was clearly a sequel to the "Elizabeth" book. While the *Athenaeum* called *The Solitary Summer* "[a] charming chronicle of the charming Elizabeth's latest freak," *St.*

James Gazette noted that the sequel "[k]eeps up the high level of grace and charm reached by its forerunner," and the *Spectator* called it "[a] second book. . .which is even more charming than the first"; meanwhile, the *Times* wrote that "[t]he best praise we can give it—and it is really very high praise—is to call it a sequel to 'Elizabeth' with all the charm of its predecessor and none of the common faults of a sequel".[25] Von Arnim's extension of the "Elizabeth" franchise should, perhaps, more accurately be referred to as an "evolution," for though von Arnim was indeed interested in maximizing profits, she was equally dedicated to experimenting with generic form in order to reflect her changing creative vision and her keen sense of reader tastes. She was already moulding the "Elizabeth" sequel to suit her own writerly process in 1899, as the following letter to her publisher suggests:

> I have written a paper, intended to be the first of a number sufficient to make a book of the size of 'Elizabeth,' and my idea was that it might be a relief while working at the novel to write the remaining papers from time to time and let them come out in a magazine, reserving the copyright of publishing them later, when enough have been written, in book form. The first is called "The Pious Pilgrimage" and is an account of a visit I paid to the garden of my youth. (15 Apr. 1900 32)

She did not end up publishing a book-length collection of these "little essays on different things that interest me"; however, the publication of "The Pious Pilgrimage," as well as the letter informing us of her intentions, suggests the degree to which she was thinking, with characteristic middlebrow marketing savvy, of ways in which she might extend the

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[25] See von Arnim's scrap book of reviews in the Countess Russell Archive (Huntington Library, San Marino, California) for these and other reviews of her novels.

profits of her initial "Elizabeth" investment in both the economic and cultural senses of the word.

A similar evolution and experimentation with form is noticeable in the book-length "Elizabeth" sequels that followed. Von Arnim's third "Elizabeth" book appropriated many of the familiar characters from *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, but shifted the narrative from first to third-person perspective and changed the narrative's focus from Elizabeth's gardening anxieties to the antics of Elizabeth's daughters, the April, May, and June babies. This change in focus was central to von Arnim's decision to temporarily shift her target reading audience from adult to children readers with the *April Baby's Book of Tunes*. She described the book to Frederic Macmillan as

> a little story for children, with tunes to nine of the old nursery rhymes and one hymn tune. The tunes are some I wrote for my own babies, and I have written the story of how they came to be composed, and so have strung them together. It would have to be printed in larger type, and have a great many illustrations, as there is not much of it. . .It might be called "the April Baby's Book of Tunes with the story of how they came to be written" and be dedicated to the April Baby. (9 Jan 1900)

Furthermore, von Arnim was as anxious as always with concerns regarding the marketing of her books and as such, had suggestions to make to Macmillan about the sequel's potential as a holiday tie-in: "It ought to come out at Easter, as you will see if you read it," she wrote, referring to the fact that the narrative begins during the week before Easter in Elizabeth's German garden, where Elizabeth is charged with the task of diverting her children during an unseasonable cold snap. Like *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and

Solitary Summer, *April Baby's Book of Tunes* predictably delivered the type of cross-cultural observations with which von Arnim had previously been identified. "German Easters are very nice things," writes the narrator, "something like Christmas, only instead of tables covered with presents round the Christmas tree, the presents are hidden out in the garden, in the grass or among the bushes that are generally just turning a faint green" (8). In addition to the stock cultural insights provided by the narrator, the reader would also recognize the slightly humorous infant piety of the April, May, and June babies, as well as their pigeon-English dialect. *April Baby's Book of Tunes* was gauged for a much younger readership than either of the initial "Elizabeth" books; the book begins, for example, in traditional story-book manner with the lines "Once upon a time" (3). However, von Arnim ensured that its appeal was broad enough for the book to be purchased and consumed by readers of all ages. Kate Greenaway's delicate watercolours, for example, were familiar to adults and children alike. The fact that it is, quite literally, a "book of tunes" as well as a story-book also would appear to have recommended it for inter-generational use, especially as the narrative modeled generational interaction through "Elizabeth's" regular dialogues with and performances for the April, May, and June babies, who interpret the musical nursery rhymes in a manner familiar to readers of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*. Thus *April Baby's Book of Tunes* may be seen as not only reinforcing consumers' loyalty to the "Elizabeth" brand, but also creating a whole new generation of reader-consumers.

When von Arnim presented readers with *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen* in 1904, reviewers celebrated the appearance of yet another "Elizabethan Book" (as the *Guardian* called it in its review on 9 March, 1904), though they did not necessarily know

quite what to make of Elizabeth's latest formal experiment. She related her inspiration for the travel guide-cum-novel to Macmillan in a letter dated 21 January 1902:

> I have begun an account of a drive lasting three weeks that I took last summer round the island of Rugen in the Baltic but am not very far on with it. My idea was to make it something like your *Highway and Byway Series*, and have it illustrated, but it would not be quite so practical and serious as the volumes are.[26]

Reviewers recommended *Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen* as a book which fulfilled the same reading needs as its initial precursor. The *Daily Mail* review assured its readers, for instance, that the book had "the same distinctive charm as its predecessor, the same unforced wit, the same wholesomeness that made Elizabeth's *Garden* so successful a tonic for the dreary-minded" (qtd in Usborne 102). It is interesting to note, at this point, the metaphors used by reviewers to describe the Elizabeth sequels, for it may help us understand why the collection of products ranged under brand have a tendency to be called a "family". Hailing the appearance of *The Adventures of Elizabeth in Rugen*, for example, the *Illustrated London News* offered a gestational model for the products under the "Elizabeth" brand: "For the fifth time, the author of 'Elizabeth and Her German Garden' has put forth a book: her literary works now outnumber her nurselings by two. 'I have had,' she says, 'a little row of babies, and have brought it up quite nicely'; and the same may be claimed for her little row of books" (12 Mar. 1904). The "Elizabeth" brand family in this formulation brings together several facets of middlebrow marketing culture discussed above. For example, such a metaphor distinctly valorizes book production through a sentimental trope of maternal labour and reproduction, thus elevating it to the

[26] The *Highways and Byways Series* was inaugurated by Macmillan and Company with volumes on Devon and Cornwall in 1897 (Morgan 189-9).

sanctified level one might expect of high art; however, it has also been naturalized in the terms of horticulture, with the general effect that the artistic project is revealed to be a product of one woman's simple devotion to the process of cultivation, where "little row[s]" of produce emerge without fail, like Elizabeth's own books, as perennial favourites every year. The "Elizabeth" brand was also boosted by a market phenomenon that Radway, with her focus concentrated so specifically on the Book of the Month Club institution, does not develop: literary celebrity.

The concept of literary celebrity will not be foreign to the historian of nineteenth-century literature. Studies of lionized literary figures from Lord Byron to Charles Dickens no doubt provide insight about their respective reception; however, very little systemized attention has given to the the institutionalization of literary celebrity over the course of the nineteenth century. In fact, what little work that has been done on the concept of the celebrity comes to us via historians of the film industry and its related "star system": as Matthew Tinkcom and Amy Villarego have noted in their introduction to *Keyframes*, actors became "stars" when film studios realized the amount of profit familiar names and images could generate through repeat custom (1). The star thus became "a powerful tool for creating the sense of product differentiation vital to commodity culture", and as such, functioned in a manner similar to brand (1). Thus Tinkcom and Villarego declare that the star is *not* a person, but should be understood as a "carefully calculated product" or "persona" that has been "engineered by publicity" in order to maximize studio profits (1). The literary celebrity of the nineteenth century functioned analogously, engineered and maintained through a growing apparatus of author-appearances, literary tours, and periodical puffs. While von Arnim would have found it

diffult to maintain her anonymity through the first two aspects of the celebrity apparatus, "Elizabeth" took on celebrity status through the extensive attention of the contemporary periodical press. In fact, far from barring von Arnim from celebrity, her choice to remain anonymous actually functioned as a catalyst to her popularity.

The effect of "Elizabeth's" anonymity spawned a periodical press campaign to uncover the identity of the celebrity, as readers clamoured to find out more about the real woman behind the fiction, the inspiration behind the brand. It might be worth noting that the 1880s and 90s craze for detective novels and narratives (evidenced in the success of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* series, for example) seems to have been capitalizing on a general contemporary taste for narratives of mystery and detection if the press coverage of 'Elizabeth' is any indication. Note, for example, the discourse of detection in the *Pall Mall Gazette*'s coverage of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, which "rouse[s] in us a spirit of pardonable curiosity—who and what, is Elizabeth, we desire to know!" (12 Jan. 1899). Meanwhile, the *Sunday Examiner* declared "Elizabeth" "The Literary Mystery of the Holidays" (January 4, 1901), devoting a full-page spread to its discussion:

> The monthly report of the libraries all over the country, as printed in "The Critic" this month, shows that the most popular book of the hour is "Elizabeth and Her German Garden." But who wrote the book neither author nor publisher will tell. It is a mystery.

The identity of the novel's author would appear to have captivated the nation according to the *Examiner*'s reports; why, even the source of the novel's appeal becomes part of the literary mystery in the *Examiner*'s view:

> At lunches 'Elizabeth' is still discussed. At teas, women pass her in review after the delightful fashion of people who love without the thought of wherefore. They have all the pleasure of it and none of the task.
>
> Pin them down and they will say
>
> 'Oh, those dear little children! And that bed of lilacs! And the library! Ah, how restful.' And isn't it delightful not to know who did it.'

Thanks to the advent of photographic technology and advances in photomechanical reproduction, the *Examiner* enlisted readers in a process of collective detection by including photographs from the books as titillating clues to the author's true identity:

> Through the courtesy of the publishers, however, we are enabled to print views of that mysterious "German Garden," and if any reader is able to identify these views the literary puzzle of the year will be solved.

The *Examiner* offered readers three potential "suspects" for the authorship—Princess Henry of Prussia; Daisy, Princess Pless; and Countess von Arnim—before concluding that "[i]t is delicious, this picture of a woman holding the key to the biggest literary mystery of the day! (4 Jan. 1901). The *Daily Mail* also suggested potential candidates, offering illustrations of each. Macmillan having sent her a copy of its coverage, von Arnim noted that "[it] amused me very much, especially as my portrait is purely imaginary" (24 Oct. 1900 41). The *Atheneum* claimed to have uncovered "Elizabeth"'s identity in its April 1st issue, prompting von Arnim to write to Macmillan and ask him to contradict its report on account of it having incorrectly reported her maiden name (4 Apr., 1899). Certainly the extensive press coverage of the mystery of "Elizabeth" helped to create her as a celebrity figure: as von Arnim's biographer, Karen Usborne notes,

"Unnamed, Elizabeth was, for a short time, the most famous woman in the English-speaking world" (75).

One of the more significant discourses developing around the culture of celebrity by the 1890s was the literary interview, a journalistic genre that traditionally presented the author to readers via an intimate conversation, often within the context of the author's own home. In his article "Signs of Intimacy: the Literary Celebrity in the 'Age of Interviewing," Richard Salmon explains that such interviews were designed to offer the reader "a comforting reassurance as to the essentially bourgeois character of authorship" (174), a purpose which locates this discourse within a middlebrow cultural logic insofar as it involves middleclass readers seeing bourgeois life as worthy of artistic representation. At least part of the motivation for presenting writers as bourgeois figures, however, probably springs from a middlebrow marketing logic; as previously noted, middlebrow marketing encouraged readers to identify consumption as one strategy of self-cultivation and self-fashioning. Implicit in the choice of the celebrity author's home as the physical location for the interview was the assumption that the author's things—i.e. his/her material possessions, books, and domestic setting—would provide a revealing commentary on his/her subjectivity.[27] The home was seen as a "sanctified space" within

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[27] Salmon notes the increased manifestation of biographical interest in the homes of famous author near the end of the nineteenth century, pointing to a proliferation of volumes documenting the 'homes and haunts' and 'literary shrines' of famous authors:

> Titles such as *Home Life of Great Authors* (1887), *A Literary Pilgrimage Among the Haunts of Famous British Authors* (1895), and *Homes and Haunts of Famous Authors* (1906) (to name only a few) indicate both the generic proportions which this literature reached and the entirely habitual character of the iconography it deployed. (165-6)

the interview because, Salmon notes, it was seen to "express the very essence of the subject's personality" (166) and its topography "was often explicitly read as a domain of revelatory signs" (166). Life-style became just as significant as rhetorical style within the literary interview because readers believed in "the revelatory capacity of objects [to] allow[] insight, not merely into the worldly success of the celebrity, but, more importantly, into the (supposed) inner nature of the creative mind" (167). Thus the interview not only offered readers a comforting reassurance of the author's bourgeois character, but also reassured them that they too, as middle-class consumers, could tap into the creative genius of the artist by styling their lives in a similar manner. Furthermore, thanks to developments in photographic technology and photomechanical reproductions, photographs of the author's home and haunts accompanied the copy, offering readers an even more intimate glimpse of their creative state of mind (Salmon 169).

But how exactly does this discourse help us to understand the celebrity-status of von Arnim, you may ask, especially considering that she chose to remain anonymous throughout her career? While von Arnim's anonymity necessarily disallowed her from actively engaging in literary interviews, it did not stop her from exploiting the discourse of the literary interview—its strategies and its tropes—in her "Elizabeth" narratives. The "Elizabeth" books tend to function as displaced literary interviews, providing an intimate behind-the-scenes glimpse into a literary woman's ideas and subjectivity. Significantly, "Elizabeth's" literary personality was constructed not just through the record of her own

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Elizabeth von Arnim herself was interested in literary tourism. In an unpublished speech she discussed her interest in the haunts and home of the Brontës, for example:

> I thought I would talk about the Brontës, those tragic figures of Victorian days, and take you with me, if you will come, on a pilgrimage I made last spring to the bleak Yorkshire village and still more bleak Yorkshire parsonage in which they burned out their brief lives. (Countess Russell Papers, Huntington Library)

words and thoughts, but also through the revelatory setting of her home and garden, photographs of which were added to the text to accompany narrative descriptions. In the first two books particularly, Elizabeth's library and garden are foregrounded as special significatory sites, attesting to the author's artistic vision and dedication to cultivation and consumption. "Elizabeth" describes her library in extensive detail, for example, in the following passage:

> The house, half-buried in the snow, looked the very abode of peace; and I ran through all the rooms, eager to take possession of them again, and feeling as though I had been away forever. When I got to the library I came to a standstill—ah, the dear room, what happy times I have spent in it rummaging amongst the books, making plans for my garden, building castles in the air, writing, dreaming, doing nothing! There was a big peat fire blazing half up the chimney, and the old housekeeper had put pots of flowers about, and on the writing-table was a bunch of violets scenting the room. . . The library is not used by the Man of Wrath; it is neutral ground where we meet in the evenings for an hour before he disappears into his own rooms—a series of very smoky dens in the south-east corner of the house. It looks, I am afraid, rather too gay for an ideal library; and its colouring, white and yellow, is so cheerful as to be almost frivolous. There are white books cases all round the walls, and there is a great fireplace, and four windows, facing full south, opening on to my most cherished bit of garden, the bit round the sun-dial; so that with so much colour and such a [] fire and such floods of sunshine it has anything but a sober air, in spite of the venerable volumes filling the shelves.

> Indeed, I should never be surprised if they skipped down from their places, and, picking up their leaves, began to dance. (*Elizabeth and her German Garden* 86-7)

"Elizabeth's" description of her library almost appears to exemplify the principle articulated by interwar book enthusiast Jane Guthrie in 1925, that through books one "learn[s] how *human* and interesting a room can be made" (qtd in Radway 149).

Within the logic of middlebrow culture, books do not only make a room human; they actually help to mould the humanity of the person living in the room. This principle is certainly demonstrated in the "Elizabeth" narratives, for she describes her library as a key site for theorizing future plans for cultivation, "making plans for my gardens, [and] building castles in the air" (*Solitary Summer* 40). "Elizabeth's" library is, furthermore, a key site for reflecting on past self-cultivation, for she cites books as a strong influence upon her social and moral education. In fact, the record of her reading over a lifetime functions as something of a biography of her life. The bookcase fitted around the central pillar of her library is particularly significant in this regard, holding "the very elect among [her] favourites" (31) through different periods in her life. Coming across a volume of Thomas Carlyle, for instance, she reminisces about her younger years—"when my hair was very long, and my skirts were very short"—and recalls "s[itting] in the paternal groves with *Sartor Resartus*, and fe[eling] full of wisdom" (31). Having entered an altogether different stage of life, however, her taste has developed and changed:

> Now, whether it is age creeping upon me, or whether it is that the country is very still and sound carries, or whether my ears have grown sensitive, I know not; but the moment I open him there rushes out such a clatter of denunciation, and vehemence, and wrath, that I am completely deafened; and as I . . . love peace, . . .

> [he] has has been degraded from his high position round the pillar and has gone into retirement against the wall. (*Solitary Summer* 32).

She has not given up Carlyle altogether though: she finds in his *Life of Sterling* a book more in keeping with the values and pace of domestic life at middle age, for it is "a record of an uneventful life, in which the natural positions of subject and biographer are reversed, the mass of genius writing the life of the unimportant friend" (*Solitary Summer* 33). Previously noted as a characteristic of middlebrow thinking, anti-intellectualism characterizes Elizabeth's approach to reading. She resists a transcendent narrative of reading propagated by intellectuals, which she brands as masculine and intellectually cosmopolitan, noting instead that for women, particularly those charged with domestic duties, reading is an extremely implicated process. Elizabeth warns against a protocol of reading that advocates aescetism, necessitating that one cut oneself off from the world. However good it is to read Thoreau in her gardens, she notes that

> he gets grimly carried back for all that, and is taken into the house and put on his shelf and left there, because I still happen to have a body attached to my spirit which, if not fed at the ordinary time, becomes a nuisance. [Thoreau] . . . is right; luncheon is a snare of the tempter, and I would perhaps try to sail by it like Ulysses [tied to the mast] if I had a biscuit in my pocket to comfort me, but there are the babies to be fed, and the Man of Wrath, and how can a respectable wife and mother sail past any meridian shallows in which those dearest to her have stuck?

Like the Book of the Month Club, the "Elizabeth" brand appears to invest a great deal in defining the various scenes, settings, and strategies of the reading habit. Elizabeth

reminds her reader, "Books have their idiosyncrasies as well as people, and will not show me their full beauties unless the place and time in which they are read suits them" (26).

While she potters about in the garden with Goethe (28) and sits with Walt Whitman in the evening (29), she takes Keats with her to the forest (30) and reserves Spenser for the shores of the Baltic Sea (29-30). Thoreau, she declares, "is a person who loves the open air, and will refuse to give you much pleasure if you try to read him amid the pomp and circumstance of upholstery" (24). She sees reading as a particularly edifying practice of consumption that should be distinguished from run-of-the-mill commercial consumption: "[H]ow easy it would have been to come into the world without this [love for books], and possessed instead of an all-consuming passion, say, for hats, perpetually raging round my empty soul!" (30). She presents a catalogue of her library (as previously noted, a common trope in middlebrow novels of the feminine type), in order to reveal the diversity and breadth of her reading, but also to reveal in its willy nilly juxtapositions of high and low-brow literature—she notes "Jane Austen sandwiched between Heine and Miss Mitford"—a taste for the eclectic. She evidently takes pleasure in anti-intellectualism, deflating those authors who are too autocratic or demanding of their readers. "[W]ho am I that I should talk in this unbecoming manner of Carlyle?" she asks her reader rhetorically in a moment of self-consciousness, before asserting confidently, "I am only. . . seeking after peace, devoid of the least real desire to criticize anybody and merely anxious to get out of the way of geniuses when they make too much noise" (34). She thus asserts the ultimate power of the reader; that is, the power to shut the book, an act which suggests the ascendancy of the reader in a middlebrow order of reading.

It is worth noting, in terms of brand relationship, that "Elizabeth" refers to books interchangeably with their authors, as if the books were prosthetic extensions of authorial personality. Thus her reading functions very much like a conversation or dialogue with the author, demonstrating a flexible model of friendship in which the reader is empowered to pursue or sever relations according to her wishes. Furthermore, it is worthwhile noting that the library is closely aligned with the garden in the "Elizabeth" narratives. Over the course of the narrative "Elizabeth" seems constantly to be blurring the physical boundaries of these two sites, taking books out of the library to read in the garden, for example, and bringing huge armfuls of flowers from the garden to festoon the library. The alignment of the sites of horticulture and book-consumption reflect the degree to which the practices of self-cultivation and consumption were seen to be two sides of the same coin within a middlebrow cultural logic.

Thus von Arnim seems to have made the most of literary celebrity, exploiting the "mystery" of anonymity, while simultaneously enjoying the celebration of her lifestyle and personal aesthetic in the form of "Elizabeth". Von Arnim's choice to embrace literary celebrity at a distance also allowed her to sidestep the problem plaguing an increasing number of her contemporaries: Richard Salmon notes authors' growing resentment that the phenomenon of literary celebrity was causing their work to be displaced "from its position as the privileged object of literary interpretation" by practices like interviewing that "construed the 'life' as a more vital source of meaning" than the writer's art (159). Salmon sees such a resentment articulated by contemporaries such as Henry James, whose short story "The Death of the Lion" (1894)

> envisaged the mythical, and distinctively modern, fate of the artist as celebrity. Besieged by journalists, lionizers, and autograph-hunters, the celebrated writer is subjected to a voracious desire for knowledge concerning his life, whilst, conversely, the work, upon which his literary fame supposedly rests, is neglected. (159)

Elizabeth herself wrote on the problem of literary celebrity in a short unpublished essay entitled "The Anonymous in Poetry":

> Nothing, if we are to get the greatest amount of warmth from him, should be known of a poet except what he chooses to tell us in his works. There, in those holy moments of insight and communion, he weaves a lovely robe of light for his soul, and dresses her in it, and presents her to the world. She is shown to us as he wishes her to be shown, at her most radiant moment. And as we hope for salvation, as we cling to faith in goodness, and look to beauty for help and healing, so should we take care not to tear the robe and not to peep through keyholes after it has been set laid aside. Yet so inextricably is the god mix'd up in his wrappings of humanity that it is he himself, man dull and unforeseeing, man grasping at the passing moment, hungry for flesh-pots, for more and bigger flesh-pots, who invites us to come behind the scenes and see how she, stripped of her robe, is as covered as we are with bruises. We. . . who need encouragement and most badly need cheering, we feel what a wonderful world it would have been. . . if we had been allowed to believe what we long to believe, that the poets led lives on a level with their inspiration. . . So long as the masses love gossip, and so long as gods cannot enter life full-fledged with wisdom but are forced to begin by

being babies, so long will biographies and personalities continue to be poured into ears pricked up to receive them.

In a literary market in which authors were beginning to replace their own texts as commodities to be circulated and consumed, von Arnim actually foregrounded the commodification of her authorship in the form of the "Elizabeth" brand, allowing her to enjoy many of the benefits of literary celebrity with few of its drawbacks.

If celebrity was a positive byproduct of von Arnim's "Elizabeth" brand, a negative one was the practice of "passing off" by other cultural entrepreneurs, who cashed in on the equity of "Elizabeth" brand through imitation. The success of a brand can often be gauged from the degree to which it is imitated for, as Juliann Sivulka points out, "as the use of brand names and commercial trademarks spread, so did the practise of imitation" (52). "Passing off" is a fairly significant factor in the history of branding as a legal concept, for as is so often the case, brand was not really meaningfully defined until it was legally trespassed. According to Jill McKeough and Michael Blakeney in "Passing Off and the Commerical Media in Britain and Australia," some of the earliest examples of "passing off" are to be found in the sphere of publishing: over the course of the nineteenth century, U.K. injunctions were obtained restricting the use of newspaper names such as *Belgravia*, *Punch*, and the *London Evening News*, among others (96). The case of *Reddaway v. Barnham* in 1896 set the legal precedent for recognizing good will—the equity built by brand names and identifying marks—as legal property. "Passing off" laws were thus called into effect when the plaintiff was "able to demonstrate actual or likely confusion" among consumers as a result of imitative practices (McKeough & Blakeney 98). The strength of "Elizabeth's" brand equity may be judged by the

proliferation of books bearing the name "Elizabeth" in their title after von Arnim's success with Elizabeth and her German Garden in 1898. During the first decade of the twentieth century, we see the publication of books like *The Visits of Elizabeth* (1900), *The Letters of Her Mother To Elizabeth* (1901), *The Grandmother's Advice to Elizabeth* (1902), *Elizabeth's Children (1903), Elizabeth in Retreat* (1912) and the *Eliza* series: *Eliza* (1900); *Eliza's Husband* (1903); *Eliza Getting On* (1911); *Exit Eliza* (1912); *Eliza's Son* (1913). In utilizing the name "Elizabeth," such books were fully within their legal rights; no copyright can be taken out on specific book titles, let alone phrases or names from within book titles. However, it is important to note that in cases where two books bear the same title, readers tend to rely on second-order forms of branding such as the author brand, to help them differentiate between products. It is in this sense that the above books had the potential to confuse readers, for, like von Arnim, each of the books' authors chose to publish anonymously. Thus it was possible for readers to identify anonymously-published books with "Elizabeth" figuring strongly in their title with the "Elizabeth of the German Garden" brand, especially in the years closely following the publication of von Arnim's successful bestseller. It is difficult to ascertain to what degree authors thought these books would sell under the auspices of the "Elizabeth" brand; however, a description of a few of the "Elizabeth" books published after 1898 may give us some sense.

As noted above, the books most likely to confuse readers were those which included "Elizabeth" in their titles and were published anonymously. For example, an anonymous serial entitled "The Visits of Elizabeth" was published in *The World* in 1900. It is common knowledge now that its author was Elinor Glyn, a writer who would later

rocket to fame with the publication of *Three Weeks* in 1907. The likeness between "The Visits of Elizabeth" and "Elizabeth and her German Garden" extends beyond the name to the likeness of their respective domestic forms, the former being narrated in letters while the latter was narrated in diary form. This distinction would not necessarily preclude confusion for, as suggested by *Punch*'s misidentification of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* as an epistolary novel in "The Complete Author," such similar forms had the significant potential to be confused in readers' minds. Admittedly, there is very little similarity between the two books on the narrative level, but as product differentiation often takes place within the split-second moment of purchase, it is possible that the two "Elizabeths" may have been confused by readers.[28] Humourist Barry Pain made his own appropriation of "Elizabeth" in diminuitive form for the title of his *Eliza* books, a series of comic suburban diaries. There are, again, significant differences between "Elizabeth" and "Eliza" on the level of content: the narrator of the latter, for instance, is a man rather than a woman. However, Pain was a keen observer of trends in the book market, as evidenced by his successful parodies, so it would not be altogether surprising if he hoped to cash in on "Elizabeth's" success.

The books most likely to have confused readers, however, were *Elizabeth's Children* and *Elizabeth in Retreat* (1912), two novels anonymously published by Margaret Westrup.[29] The books not only appear to draw on von Arnim's title but echo the content and themes of her "Elizabeth" books. Though the narrator of *Elizabeth's*

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[28] When "The Visits" became popular enough to be issued in volume format by Gerald Duckworth, Glyn decided to throw caution to the wind and allow the volume to be published under her name, significantly diminishing the degree to which readers would be confused by the work. Glyn's book was seen as charismatic enough in its own right to generate a number of parodies: *The Letters of Her Mother to Elizabeth* appeared in 1901, and *The Grandmother's Advice to Elizabeth* in 1902, both by W. R. H. Trowbridge.

[29] Westrup was better known as an author by her married name, Mrs. W. Sydney Stacey.

Children is a man—Hugh Latimer—the novel plays on the trope of an Englishwoman named Elizabeth living in a foreign country. Though Westrup's Elizabeth lived in France rather than Germany, like von Arnim's Elizabeth, she brings up three adorable children (boys, in contrast with the April, May, and June babies) who predictably exhibit a lisping pigeon English and a precocious puerile piety. Despite the fact that it is narrated by a man, the novel begins by evoking "Elizabeth" as a personality already familiar to the reader. "I think my first thought on reading Elizabeth's letter," writes Hugh on the first page, "was that is was so like Elizabeth" (1). From the moment *Elizabeth's Children* appeared, then, it played on the familiar character of "Elizabeth" as whimsical and dramatic that many readers would immediately have identified with von Arnim's heroine. In fact, von Arnim discovered at least one case of brand confusion involving Westrup's "Elizabeth" books, though it was detected long after the books' respective publications. While browsing in a small lending-library in 1935, von Arnim came across a copy of *Elizabeth in Retreat*, the binding of which misattributed its authorship to "The Author of Elizabeth and her German Garden". Von Arnim arranged for Macmillan and Company to investigate the mix-up, which appears to have been the result of a second-hand book dealer's failure properly to identify the book's correct author on a replacement binding (8 Feb. 1935). Whoever was ultimately responsible, the fact that von Arnim was able to evidence consumers' confusion between her books and those of others does suggest how potent branding had become within the middlebrow book market even at the end of the nineteenth century.

This discussion of *fin-de-siècle* middlebrow marketing in general and "Elizabeth's" involvement in particular might best be concluded with the following

poem, a satirical ode to "Elizabeth" published on 7 August, 1901 in *Punch*. Entitled "The Complete Author," the poem suggests that middlebrow marketing practices were already so institutionalized by the turn of the century that they were being parodied. The poem begins by drawing attention to the phenomenon of "Elizabeth" as a name, significant with regards to our discussion of branding and brand personality as key features of middlebrow marketing logic in general, and von Arnim's marketing strategy in particular:

> If you want to be an author and to take the world by storm,
> Pay attention whilst I mention rules to which you must conform;
> First, of course, you want a heroine—it doesn't matter who—
> Plain or pretty, dull or witty, ignoramus or a blue,
> Young or middle-aged or ancient, it is really all the same,
> Provided you've decided that Elizabeth's her name.

The poem goes on, in the next stanza, to recommend that aspiring authors embrace gardening as a theme likely to appeal to contemporary readers:

> You must have a little garden, you must babble by the hour,
> Of lilies, daffodillies, hollyhock and gilly flower;
> Or when vegetables bore you, and you're anxious to relieve
> The monotony of botany, you may perhaps achieve
> A digression on the slugs and snails that eat your pet rosetrees,
> Or the habits of the rabbits, or the squirrels or the bees.

The aspiring novelist is encouraged, furthermore, to consider the benefits of anonymous publication from a marketing perspective:

> Next, whatever your temptation to behold your name in print,

It is vital that the title-page should have not author in't;

What were JUNIUS himself if his identity were known?

Who would trouble with a bubble that is burst before it's blown?

How can books without a mystery expect to make a fuss?

People grovel to a novel if it is anonymous.

The poem also recommends that the writer consider consumers' taste for novelty in form, all the while maintaining that accommodation of such tastes will ensure his/her claim to literary posterity:

As for form, you must consider what the reading-world expects,

And epistles are the thistles that the public ass effects;

So abolish old-world chapters, and at each new section's head

You had better write your "Letter Number So-and-So" instead;

And you'll quite eclipse the fame of many literary men,

For you're fated to be rated as a man of letters then.

Furthermore, the aspiring novelist is reminded of the importance of mass press coverage in creating a commercially-successful novel:

Nor forget to tell creation what a genius you are;

Every page of every paper where a mortal eye may look

Thus adorning with, "Good-morning! Have you read *Beth's Garden Book*?"

And assure them its essential they should have it on their shelves—

They might never be so clever as to learn the fact themselves. (100)

Finally, *Punch* hits upon one of the central principles of middlebrow marketing in both its *fin-de-siècle* and interwar manifestations: that readers should understand how the book as

a commodity can meet the perceived needs attendant upon modernity, offering access to social capital, a means of self-fashioning, emotional reassurance, and dependable relationship.

Epilogue

A central aim of this study has been to establish Elizabeth von Arnim's work as an important source for scholars of middlebrow culture, women's history, and genre studies. I have focused on von Arnim's initial bestseller, *Elizabeth and her German Garden,* because I think it best exemplifies the utility of von Arnim's work for historians, constituting as it does not only an important *fin-de-siècle* record of women's anxiety regarding modernity, but also a significant formalization of early middlebrow values and investments. We see clearly within its pages, as well as in the history of its reception, a middlebrow cultural formation's response to the perils and possibilities of modernity at a much earlier point than the chronological models of its historians have hitherto allowed. In fact, von Arnim's novel brings together the hallmarks of middlebrow culture—concern with consumption, self-cultivation, and cultural conservation—into a prescription for "modern living" that set the tone for middlebrow cultural initiatives from the *fin de siècle* through to the interwar period.

In fact, though she drew on a number of distinctly *fin-de-siècle* literary and social discourses like that of the New Woman and suburban living, von Arnim's work reveals a surprising amount about how middlebrow culture continued to develop. The domestic diary novel continued to be popular in the decades following the publication of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, so much so that by 1920, von Arnim was prompted to write to Hugh Walpole, "Queer how many imitators I seem to have. [. . .] Is it possible that I am becoming the founder of a School?" (30 Aug. 1920). I have discussed the sub-generic continuity between *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* and interwar feminine middlebrow novels like *Mrs. Miniver* and *Diary of a Provincial Lady*, but a longer study

might examine in greater detail the domestic diaries that followed *Elizabeth and her German Garden* and paved the way for a full-flowering of middlebrow culture by the 1920s, 30s and 40s. One might consider, for instance, books like Emily Lawless's *A Garden Diary* (1901), Mary Lucy Pendered's *Musk of Roses from the Ego Book of Delia Wyecomb* (1903) and *My Garden: A Little Record for Garden Lovers* (1909), Jane Panton's *Leaves from a Garden* (1910), and Marion Cran's *The Garden of Ignorance* (1913), as well as the continued franchise of Mrs. Earle's Potpourri series, culminating in a *Third Potpourri from a Surrey Garden* (1903) and a collaboration with Ethel Case, *Potpourri Mixed by Two* (1914). Such a history of the form and its interimplication with the social life and values of the middle classes might also take into consideration men's incursions into the field in the interwar period, Beverly Nichols being one of the best-known male practitioners of the sub-genre with his Allways trilogy (including *Down the Garden Path* in 1932, *A Thatched Roof* in 1933, and *A Village in a Valley* in 1934).

A study of the garden diary as s feminine middlebrow form might fruitfully provide an opportunity to extend the chronology of the middlebrow even further, to include manifestations of the middlebrow at the end of the twentieth century.[1] The middlebrow domestic diary novel tradition still appears to be alive and well at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even a hundred years after the publication of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, the genre continues to offer a vehicle for middlebrow values and ideological investments through its record of women's negotiations of modernity. Testimony to the genre's resilience is offered by the

[1] Certainly there has been some degree of debate about whether the term "middlebrow" can even be used to apply to culture in the post-modern era. New Yorker writer John Seabrook has suggested a new cultural order in his book *Nobrow: the Culture of Marketing-the Marketing of Culture* (2000) while others have postulated the advent of the "monobrow" with the internet. Seabrook does not make a particularly good case, however, seeming at points to confuse "nobrow" with "middlebrow".

unexpected commercial success of Edith Holden's *Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* (1977), a domestic and naturalist journal written and illustrated some seventy years before it was found and published by one of Holden's descendents. In keeping with our discussion of the genre's relationship with middlebrow cultural values, the success of the book was due in part to its claims of historical authority and cultural preservation, making every consumer a conserver of the traditions of yester-year. Nor should we be surprised that the book's commercial success was maximized through the marketing of related merchandise like the *Country Diary* gift books (which included *Country Diary Cookery Notes*, *Country Diary Garden Notes* and *Country Diary Nature Notes)*, products that not only extended the Country Diary franchise, but offered contemporary women the opportunity to make their own daily domestic lives into an art of modern living.

Though it may fall a little lower on the phrenological continuum of culture at the turn of the twenty-first century, Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) further exemplifies the continued appeal of the domestic diary novel. Like *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, Fielding's novel is concerned with women's public and private experiences of modernity, though it is a modernity that is appropriately characterized by the late twentieth-century vagaries of office romance, email, mini breaks, and home-shopping networks. Bridget Jones is torn between the demands of (and her desires for) a successful career, fulfilling romance, and domestic accomplishment. Her diary testifies to the fact that women's relationship to the domestic sphere is still a vexed one, even a century after von Arnim published her first book. In fact, Fielding's novel emerged at a cultural moment when discussions of women's relationship to domesticity were intensifying, thanks to a new brand of feminism that, ironically, focused on reclaiming

domesticity. Domestic traditionalism for women at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century is embodied by texts such as lawyer and academic Cheryl Mendelson's *Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House* (1999), Nigella Lawson's *How to be a Domestic Goddess* (2000), and most recently, Kim Wells's internet article, "I am Woman, Hear me Whisk" (Dec. 2004). As one women's magazine columnist has commented on this development in the women's book market, "Read it and sweep!" (Phillimore 106).

It is important to note, however, that the popularity of *Bridget Jones's Diary* was not entirely the product of modern gender anxiety. In keeping with the generic conventions identified with the middlebrow domestic diary novel, Fielding's novel also appealed to readers through its emphasis on self-cultivation, a theme which the diary—with its incremental chronology—is uniquely suited to convey. The narrative begins, for example, with a chapter entitled "New Year's Resolutions," in which Bridget Jones outlines her plan of self-improvement, detailing her intentions to "Stop smoking," "Purge flat of all extraneous matter," "Improve career and find new job with potential," and "Make better use of time" among other goals (3). Bridget's painstakingly-detailed diary entries allow the reader to track her progress (or, at times, her failure to progress) over time. A preoccupation with self-cultivation is not the novel's only link with previous examples of the middlebrow domestic diary novel. Elements of cultural conservation are also evident in the novel, Fielding having confessed to reliance on the plot of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in the construction of her novel. Fielding's reliance is more than an act of intertextual homage, however, for it serves the purpose of offering its readers the comfort of familiar literary conventions and characters at a cultural moment

characterized, in many ways, by increasing anonymity and impersonality. Certainly the savvy marketing of *Bridget Jones's Diary* suggests its resonance with middlebrow culture. In keeping with the marketing principles and practices discussed in Chapter Five, the franchise of *Bridget Jones's Diary* has been extended through a sequel--*Bridget Jones: the Edge of Reason* (1999)--and two film adaptations.[2] Fielding's economically-implicated approach to literary and cultural production attests to the power of the marketing principles and practices that have allowed a middlebrow cultural formation not only to survive, but to thrive, over the course of the last century.

The continuing legacy of middlebrow culture and values evident at the end of twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century is not limited to literature, the advent of modern television and film technology having brought with it a variety of new vehicles for a middlebrow "art of modern living". Filmic adaptations of literary classics have abounded for several decades, catering to a middlebrow audience's taste for cultivation through familiarity with the classics, in a manner that might parallel the suburban craze for classics noted by T. H. Crosland at the *fin de siècle*. Television has emerged at the end of the twentieth-century as a medium deeply invested in the ethos and conventions of the middlebrow preoccupation with the art of living, particularly in its aspirational form. Contemporary taste for reality television has especially promoted a sense that all viewers are capable, through hard work and a little know-how, of making themselves a modern masterpiece, as any cursory examination of contemporary television offerings will attest. In Britain alone, viewers are offered myriad television narratives of transformation and cultivation: while home décor transformations are the focus of such

[2] The film adaptation of *Bridget Jones's Diary* appeared in 2001 (Miramax Pictures), while the adaptation of the sequel appeared in 2004.

popular offerings as BBC's "Changing Rooms", "The Home Front," "Our House," "Rival Rooms," as well as ITV's "60 Minute Makeover", and Channel Four's "Property Ladder"; gardens are the focus of BBC's "Garden Invaders," "Garden Rivals," and "Ground Force". Cooking programmes and books aimed at improving consumers' culinary skills have also enjoyed a renaissance thanks to celebrity chefs such as Nigella Lawson, Gary Rhodes, and Jamie Oliver. This is not even to mention the programmes devoted to personal appearance, such as BBC's "What Not to Wear" and "Retail Therapy," as well as the American import, "Extreme Makeover". Interestingly, gender anxiety still provides an impetus to these narratives even a century after the New Woman debate; however, increasingly in the twenty-first century, anxiety surrounding sexual orientation has replaced it, as in programmes such as Bravo's "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy" and "Straight Dates by Gay Mates".

Furthermore, the contemporary renaissance of culture concerned with the art of modern living is strongly associated with that element of marketing we have already identified with *fin-de-siècle* middlebrow culture: personality branding. One of the most notorious examples of personality branding at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the phenomenon of Martha Stewart, the media magnate and domestic doyenne whose career has revolved around merging commercial interests with women's domestic culture. Despite a recent prison term for insider trading, Stewart continues to dedicate her Omnimedia empire to instructing consumers about the art of living. Her flagship publication, *Martha Stewart Living*, encourages readers to cultivate themselves in the domestic arts, offering advice on topics ranging from cooking, gardening, crafts, and home décor. Significantly, every monthly issue includes a calendar for readers which

offers timely gardening reminders, a schedule for household maintenance, and the opportunity for each reader to regulate her time and energy in the domestic sphere. Though Stewart's approach tends to be earnest, it is not without its moments of self-deprecating wit—her April 2001 issue, for example, included a parody of the magazine's regularly-featured monthly calendar of household tips and reminders.[3] If the Martha Stewart brand is associated with time and energy conservation, it has also become synonymous with cultural conservation, as evidenced in columns devoted to her own personal memories as well as her collections of vintage china and Americana. As might be expected from a stock-broker-turned-celebrity-homemaker, Martha Stewart has created a version of the art of modern living that is entrepreneurial: fusing commerce with the domestic arts, her aesthetic promotes consumption while her empire offers myriad opportunities to do just that, through mail order, the internet, and international retail outlets.

Another contributing factor to the recent renaissance of interest in Elizabeth von Arnim's work may well be the explosion of modern internet technology and its increasingly ubiquitous position in the domestic sphere. Just as the advent of modernity in the nineteenth-century may be credited with having inspired the development of middlebrow culture at the *fin de siècle*, internet technology has arguably inspired a new manifestation of middlebrow culture a century later. This recent manifestation has been quick to domesticate technology, turning the public and private spheres inside out and adapting the Internet for purposes ranging from relationship maintenance and shopping to recipe indexing. Perhaps the alacrity with which women, in particular, have

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[3] I am indebted, for this point, to Ann Carson and her contribution to a 2001 WMST-L discussion of contemporary women's relationship with housework.

commandeered the latest technology for domestic applications should come as no surprise: some might argue that domesticity is inherent to the Internet's form, one of its most important structural units having been dubbed the "*home*page". Nor should we surprised, considering the middlebrow's investment in the diary form, to find that one of the most popular recent innovations in the cyber sphere is the phenomenon of *blogging*, the publication of web-based diaries on the Internet. It is not in the annals of literary scholarship, but here, on the internet, that we encounter a growing interest in the work of Elizabeth von Arnim. Take, for example, the personal homepage of Janet Jarmode, a site which offers a brief biography of her favorite author, Elizabeth von Arnim, alongside her favorite cookie recipe and a link to her family tree. Similarly, a link from a personal homepage entitled *Colleen's Corner for Family and Friends* offers up Yvonne Cunningham's list of recommended reading for gardeners, a list which, incidentally, includes *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*. Knowing what we know about the middlebrow investment in cultural conservation, it probably comes as no surprise that Cunningham contextualizes her list by asserting the inherent value of garden literature as a tradition "whose offerings just seem to get richer with time". Also familiar is the fact that Cunningham's list is offered on the grounds that gardening literature has utility value, not just as a guide to horticulture but as an impetus to greater self-cultivation: she quotes garden-writer Mirabel Osler, for example, who writes that garden literature is "mental compost" that "nourishes a gardener's mind in the same way as manure nourishes plants". While Cunningham's reading recommendation is only tangentially commercial—she notes that "[m]any of the books [suggested here] are in print and can be ordered at any good bookstore"—other Internet reviews of *Elizabeth and her German*

Garden have more overtly commercial designs. The review offered by Carla Offenberger in the "What's Carla Reading" column of her business website reflects a middlebrow tendency to merge commercial interest with culture. Offenberger's referral service, launched in February 2003, relies on brand relationship to sell her product, the goods and services of local artists and manufacturers that she personally endorses. Considering the fact that her own product is based on relationship and word-of mouth marketing, it is no mistake that "What Carla's Reading" contextualizes the act of consumption within a network of relationships: "What a delightful book this was," Offenberger writes of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, explaining that she first heard of the book by word-of-mouth: "Kathy Morain of Jefferson loaned it to me months ago, and finally it has filled a few wonderful days of spring reading." Her final appeal to relational endorsement—"I think you'll enjoy her too," epitomizes a modern middlebrow approach to marketing that enthusiastically merges culture and commerce under the auspices of the art of modern lifestyle.

If further study of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* forces us to reconsider the legacy of middlebrow at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it may also compel us to reconsider the role of "place" in the development of middlebrow culture. Alan O'Shea has persuasively argued that historians of modernism have had a tendency to propagate an "overly-universalistic concept of modernity" and thus overlook "crucial national differences" by focusing almost completely on the paradigmatic experience of modernity in an American setting. This is certainly the case for historians of middlebrow culture, whose geographical model could be quite accurately summed up by Dwight MacDonald's assertation that "[t]here is something damnably American about

Mid[dlebrow] cult[ure]"(59). The fact that present studies of the middlebrow tend to characterize it as a peculiarly American phenomenon suggests that we still have a great deal of work to do in establishing the middlebrow's British inflection.[4] A continued exploration of *Elizabeth and her German Garden* promises to make a contribution to such an effort, revealing that middlebrow culture was inflected in some nationally-specifically ways in England from the *fin de siècle* on. In fact, the argument may be made that a certain type of English nationalist identity was developing not just alongside, but as a byproduct of middlebrow culture in England, an identity which continues to inform current conceptions of Englishness as essentially domestic, historical, and rural.

Finally, I think it is important to note that middlebrow culture need not be the sole context for continued study of von Arnim's work. As indicated in the introduction to this study, von Arnim's novels will be particularly important for their ability to make visible many of the "invisible" aspects of women's experiences of modernity over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. While I have attempted, over the course of this study, to reveal what von Arnim's first few novels tell us about anxieties regarding social aspiration and gender ideals in the domestic sphere, the novels constitute a nearly inexhaustible source for other facets of women's social history at the turn of the century and in the decades that followed. As Barbara Hausman's work on lactation failure and modern commercial baby formula in *The Pastor's Wife* (1914) will attest, von Arnim's work offers myriad opportunities for social historians to excavate the buried history of women's negotiations of modernity. Such a history might include discussion of women's

[4] Joan Rubin and Janice Radway's studies, for example, as exhaustive as they are, focus almost entirely on American, rather than British, middlebrow developments.

relationship with modern transport technology (*The Caravaners*), the development of all-female holidays (*The Enchanted April*), or women's participation in modern cosmetic and beauty culture (*Love*). Whatever they eventually come to include, further studies of Elizabeth von Arnim and her work promise to enrich our understanding of literary and social history, as well as the means by which they are constituted.

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